

**The Aporias of Healing:
A Theology of Post-Traumatic Becoming**

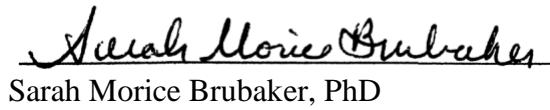
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**The Aporias of Healing:
A Theology of Post-Traumatic Becoming**

A Dissertation

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Degree of

Doctor of Theology

by

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I hereby attest that all work contained herein is representative of original work and that all material drawn from other sources is appropriately cited.

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For my beloveds: You are my lights, my loves, my reason, and my rhyme. Your
becoming has inspired my own.

The glory of God is the living man, and the life of man consists in beholding God.

—Irenaeus of Lyon

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Ch. 1 Beginnings: A Means of Introduction	4
Ch. 2 Irenaeus as Constructive Trailhead	19
Ch. 3 A Brief Historical Sketch of Selfhood	28
Ch. 4 The Traumatized Self.....	40
Ch. 5 Trauma and Community in the Biblical Text.....	64
Ch. 6 The Problems of Theodicy	85
Ch. 7 Being-Toward-Becoming.....	100
Ch. 8 The Word and the Breath	118
Ch. 9 The Spoken and the Unspoken.....	140
Ch. 10 Becoming-in-Relationship: A Post-Traumatic Theology	149
Ch. 11 Becoming in the Therapeutic Relationship	195
Ch. 12 Becoming in the Pastoral Relationship	212
The Participles of Healing	233
Bibliography	240

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do. I see you in the trenches, seeking to make a difference for love in the world. You are helping the world become more fully alive each day. Thank you, one and all.

Beginnings: A Means of Introduction

What does it mean to be fully alive after having experienced trauma?¹ Or, put differently, what does it mean to experience the worst of life and yet still choose the living way? This is the question with which this project is concerned. It is also question with which I have wrestled for nearly five years academically, and for most of the rest of my life, knowingly or unknowingly.

I grew up on a farm. My family did not farm the land—the farmer next door planted and harvested our corn and soybeans—but I learned to love the rhythms of those years. I walked the perimeters of our fields each autumn, scanning for arrowheads and pitching hedge apples into the forest beyond. In the winter, the evergreen boughs were flocked with snow, a frozen wonderland. My bedroom led out onto a tin-floored balcony. I slept many a night lulled by the sound of spring rain plinking on that tin floor, dreaming of picking fresh strawberries from our patch the next morning. In many ways, my childhood was the stuff of dreams: I had more than 40 acres to roam at will, a creek in which to splash on the hottest of days, and a summer garden bursting with flavor and life. I had a large extended family, an inquisitive mind, and a wide variety of activities to keep me engaged. Yet, as is true in most lives, mine was tinged with trauma and loss. While the type and severity of traumas varies widely, I mention my own only to say I have almost always known trauma's touch, the marks it leaves on a soul. I knew then

1. For the purposes of this project, trauma refers to an event or series of events that exceeds the human person's capacity to cope, resulting in long-term neurobiological changes.

viscerally what I can now explain academically, though it would take many years before I was able to give language to my experiences.

My interest in religious expression began in junior high school. In 1993, I was in the eighth grade. It was the last year I would live in my childhood home. Later that summer we would move, a family grown from five to seven in one swollen, sweltering summer, from my idyllic farm to the mid-sized city near which we lived. That fall, I would move from public to private school and take the city bus to the high school where I knew only three people. I would come to understand—at least in part—the way some of my early experiences were contributing to my pain and dysfunction. I would go to therapy for the first time. Before the end of high school, I would trade my lifelong dream of becoming a teacher for the hope of becoming a therapist like mine, who had helped me save my life. But I am getting ahead of myself.

In the spring of 1993, the siege at Waco took place over 51 days.² The stories dominated the evening news and, being a bit of a precocious child, I was rapt. I consumed the updates about this sect, learning what I could of the Branch-Davidians. I knew they were led by a charismatic man who called himself David Koresh. I learned that there were only nine people who left the building voluntarily—the rest were either shot, burned, or suffocated to death. I learned about another side of religion, the side that tethers people to beliefs that bring death. I wanted to know more about this side of faith, so far removed from my own Anabaptist, pacifistic upbringing. The Branch-Davidian

2. United States Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, *Report of the Department of the Treasury on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Investigation of Vernon Wayne Howell Also Known as David Koresh*, September 1993, accessed December 9, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/reportofdepartme00unit/page/n21/mode/2up?q=51+days>

sect introduced me to a world of religious expression I had not previously understood, but I believed it to be relatively isolated. (This was before the advent of widespread household internet use; I knew nothing of Jonestown, to name but one cultic group ending in the deaths of the majority of its members).

Just a few years later, in 1997, I would be disabused of this notion when the comet Hale Bopp soared across the sky. It took with it the lives of 39 people who belonged to the Heaven's Gate movement, a group who believed they would escape this earthly plane on a spaceship hidden in the comet's tails.³ This time, the world wide web offered a treasure trove of material, and I began a deep-dive into the world of new religious movements that persists to this day. I wanted to know what made people believe that salvation lay in a human being, or a spaceship, such that they followed to the death. What I did not yet understand was that Christianity, in its most prevalent North American expression, can use tactics not unlike those of cult leaders to guilt and shame persons into the same kinds of death-dealing beliefs, can trap them in systems that kill.⁴

Eventually, marriage and childrearing relegated my questions about cultic belief and practice to the back of my mind. While I continued to read about religious practices so severe as to bring deep trauma and even death, I never thought much about practices

3. The San Diego Union-Tribune, "Heaven's Gate: A Timeline," last modified March 18, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20081003124716/http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20070318/news_lz1n18timelin.html

4. There are myriad resources on the markers of cults and cultic involvement. I reference Robert Jay Lifton's seminal volume, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York, NY: Norton, 1961). Of Lifton's eight criteria, the ones I see most abundantly in American Evangelicalism, as evinced by the experiences of my counseling clients, are mystical manipulation, demand for purity, confession, sacred science, and doctrine over person. For further reading, please see Lifton or, I recommend as a primer Steven Hassan, *Combating Cult Mind Control*, 4th ed. (Newton, MA: Freedom of Mind Press, 2018).

that could bring people back to life. After my last child was born, at the encouragement of my therapist at the time, I decided to pursue my master's degree in professional counseling. My hope was to work with cult-affected persons.

After the first year of graduate school, I still wanted to work with persons who had left religious cults. However, I was frustrated that I was not learning anything about how healthy spirituality might aid in healing from the experiences of those who had been cult-involved. The program, as is true of many Evangelical Christian programs, was fraught with Christian triumphalism and spiritual bypassing (more on that in chapter 5). I knew I lacked understanding of how Christian orthodoxy came to be accepted doctrine, as well as how religion functioned in people's lives. Frustrated by this, I decided to enroll in a Master of Theological Studies program to broaden my education. The experience of seminary was like scales falling from my eyes, for suddenly I saw everything about life and faith differently. Having recently left an evangelical movement in which I had spent my adult faith life, one that nearly cost me my marriage, self-respect, and calling, I had taken refuge in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). During that time, I was encouraged to pursue ordination in that tradition.

At the same time, I was beginning to see clients in my counseling practicum and internship. On the first day of my counseling practicum, I sat in on one session with the psychologist who owned the practice. I clearly remember walking into the "Staff Only" area behind the reception desk afterward. Standing there in my office-casual attire after a decade of mothering full-time, still reeling from a process I had so long engaged from the client side, the administrative assistant handed me a list of the seven clients I would see on my own for the rest of that day. It was at that moment I realized *I* was the therapist

now. *I* was responsible for facilitating the healing these strangers needed. *I* was going to hear their stories and begin to make maps that would help lead clients from the morass of trauma into a “spacious place” of healing. I was terrified.

Yet I knew how trauma had worked in my life. I knew its serpentine weavings, its believable, long-echoed lies. I knew the silence it required of me, and I knew therapy meant speaking, laying bare before a trusted other all that I held to be true. These early experiences with clients taught me that trauma has a pattern, and it functioned for them much the same as it had in my life. Our traumatic experiences taught us something about who we were and how the world worked, and its effects were both far-reaching and long-lasting. Trauma survivors of all stripes could become stuck in the trauma space, reliving the nightmare of the worst moments of their lives. Those who had a faith tradition often attributed their suffering to God (e.g., God’s will or plan, God who watched and did nothing to save). I came to understand, then, that my work would not be limited to cult recovery, nor would I be able neatly to separate my clinical work from my theological convictions.

I came to the study and practice of theology, then, by the back door. Because I so deeply loved the experience of seminary, and because I had been encouraged to do so by several persons whom I respect, I decided to come under care and nurture for ordination. I had no designs on pastoring a church, but I believed those who said they saw in me gifts for pastoral leadership. I decided during that season to pursue a doctorate in religion, and though I did not know in what area, I was strongly considering Hebrew Bible. That changed during the spring of my second year of seminary when I took a class on constructive theology. I chose a challenging text for the course, Catherine Keller’s *The*

Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming. So thrilled was I by Keller's words that I emailed my professor before the class even began, writing, "If this is what it can mean to do theology, I could give my life to it." I knew then that I wanted to do constructive work in my doctoral program, and was able to devote my master's thesis to sketching some of the moves for this piece. Having come to seminary to understand how to work with cult-affected persons, then having decided to pursue ordination, I also came to understand myself as one who wanted to write theology that refuses to minimize or elide the effects of trauma to maintain the damaging status quo (viz., triumphalist and patriarchal) of wide swaths of American Christianity.

Thankfully, a segment of Christian theology has begun to reevaluate—and perhaps even correct—in a systematic way the response of our faith to the pain of the world. Too often the impulse has been to defend God (i.e., theodicy) to the detriment of trauma survivors, in that theodicy is primarily esoteric and apologetic in nature. There are volumes of Christian defenses of God's goodness over against the suffering world, works that, to varying degrees, satisfy a human longing to understand how to reconcile a Deity who is ultimately and profoundly good with the grave evils found in the world. This piece is expressly and explicitly *not* a theodicy, for it aims not to respond in defense of the Holy or to assert that belief is needful, but rather describe a means of relating to God and the world after trauma. What we are after here is *not* a restoration of a pre-trauma understanding of the Deity, but rather the person's capacity for becoming-in-relationship.

This work is not intended primarily to prescribe specific clinical or religious means that may be helpful for those who are working with traumatized persons as they move through their trauma (e.g., prayer, church attendance). While these practices may

be parts of a person's healing process, there is already a significant body of extant literature on this topic.⁵ Rather, I hope to offer a vision, a fully-fleshed framework, of post-traumatic spirituality that takes seriously trauma's effects and offers a theology large enough to acknowledge those affects while still holding space for faith practice.

Following that, I offer some practical means of engaging post-traumatic theology from both clinical and pastoral perspectives.

Over the last several decades, some theologians have begun to forge a path toward post-traumatic spirituality. This forging involves both deconstructing static theologies and constructing theories that involve and incorporate learnings across the sciences. Yet one significant problem at the intersection of traumatology and theology is that much of the theology surrounding trauma comes from persons who have no clinical experience. Likewise, much of the faith-based literature from therapists comes from persons who are not trained as theologians. I have the privilege of being dually trained as well as bi-vocational, bringing real experiences of trauma to bear on theories of what it means to live into "posttraumatic spirituality"⁶ in both clinical and pastoral settings. In my clinical work, I see trauma and its manifestations every day. Clients have experiences they cannot reconcile with the world (and the God) they thought they knew, and thus find themselves stuck for months and years and lifetimes. Likewise, in my pastoral work, parishioners

5. See, for example: Philip R. Baldwin, Kenia Velasquez, Harold G. Koenig, Ramiro Salas, & Peter A. Boelens, "Neural Correlates of Healing Prayers, Depression and Traumatic Memories: A Preliminary Study," *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 27 (2016): 123-129; Tanya Marie Luhrmann, "Making God Real and Making God Good: Some Mechanisms through Which Prayer May Contribute to Healing," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 5 (2013): 707-725.

6. R.Ruard Ganzevoort, "'All things work together for good'? Theodicy and Posttraumatic Spirituality" eds. W. Gräb & L. Charbonnier, *Secularization Theories, Religious Identity, and Practical Theology* (Münster, Germany: 2009), 183-192.

carry their unhealed trauma into the life of the church, and though most of us are entirely unaware of their histories, the effects thereof become apparent over time. While there is deep value in listening to the voices of professionals across disciplines, there is to be found in first-hand experience such as I have a different, more nuanced, understanding of this subject matter. I am grateful to have been dually-trained and bring an understanding of both subjects to bear on this project.

Writing a theology of post-traumatic spirituality is something I have been interested in for several years. As noted earlier, I sketched this project in my master's thesis and, during my doctoral work, have continued in practice as both a clinician and clergyperson. The shift to pastoral ministry as a primary vocation has helped me think more about the church's place in trauma healing in ways I had not previously considered. In all three settings—lectern, couch, and pulpit—I have mused on what healthy post-traumatic spirituality can look like (and what it cannot).

I intend in this work to develop a Christian theology of post-traumatic spirituality as it applies individually, interpersonally, and corporately. It is my hope that this work represents a faithful rendering of both trauma healing and Christian theology. Because clinical understandings of trauma and its healing are changing rapidly, the church, as an institution whose purpose is to connect humans to the Holy, must be present to, and seek to usher in, that ultimate work of God: restoration.

The challenges of such a project are myriad, for trauma healing is a decidedly personal endeavor. By that I mean, in line with leading trauma-expert Bessel van der Kolk, each person's system is unique and likewise will require a unique set of healing

methods.⁷ For this reason, a Christian theology of post-traumatic spirituality must be simultaneously faithful to Christian tradition and practice and open enough for trauma survivors to find themselves uniquely within it. I have chosen Shelly Rambo's important book, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (2010) as a theological starting place for this project. Her book offers a helpful framework for understanding the effects of trauma on time, body, and word, as well as the import of witness for survivors. As both theological and trauma-healing literature have borne out, there are many trailheads available as starting places for healing. I have chosen what I understand as the ultimate aim and end of the Divine-human interaction: the glory of God through the living person.

Early in seminary, I was required to read Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* in a course on orthodoxy and heresy. Certainly, the course was informative, but the thing that most captivated me was a line from the famed heresiologist's masterwork: "The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God."⁸ One rendering of the Latin, found in a bestselling evangelical author John Eldredge's book, reads, "The glory of God is man fully alive."⁹

What, then, does it mean to be alive—*fully* alive? I approach the question from three related, but distinct, angles. As a theologian, there are rich philosophical questions to be mined from this single line of text: "What does it mean to be living?" "Is 'living' a physical state only?" "How might a person 'behold God'?" As a trauma therapist, I ask

7. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 3.

8. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* IV:20:7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103420.htm>, italics supplied.

9. John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 10.

procedural questions, such as, “How does a person move through trauma really to live again?” “How might ‘beholding God’ assist in healing from trauma?” As a pastor, I ask, “How does trauma ripple out from individuals, myself included, to affect my whole congregation?” and “How can I help make the church a place where it is safe and bounded enough to engage and make space for trauma and its healing?” I am privileged to bring my theological training and practice, as well as my experience in the counseling room, to bear on these profound questions of life and God.

Irenaeus situates his understanding in the Christ figure, *grounded in the Creator*, as the answer to living fully alive. That is, the “fixedness” of the Father-Son relationship allows for the revelation of God, which, in turn, supports human life. The problem, of course, is that trauma by definition upsets any fixed understanding of life and the world. Irenaeus’ focus on fixedness fails to serve, and indeed causes harm, to the person trapped in trauma’s wake, which I will discuss in much more detail in the next chapter.

As noted above, Shelly Rambo helpfully provides a theological framework for understanding trauma as disruptions in time, body, and word. Still, her answer to the problem—witnessing from the middle—is often insufficient for deep healing, a healing-toward-becoming, to take place. I will take this up more fully in chapter four. If witnessing is not fully sufficient to move the individual toward becoming, how might we move toward a more fulsome becoming?

Articulating a means of healing-toward-becoming is this work’s primary aim. Using Yeats’s classic poem “The Second Coming” as a vehicle for understanding what it means to live with trauma, specifically what it means to return to the God in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), I will propose that life may be found

again in what I will call the “participles of God.” In this case, the primary participle is “becoming.” Participles function, in the English language, as a hybrid of verb and adjective. They are non-finite, modify that which follows, and may be active or passive. All of these uses of the participles rhyme with the ways in which trauma impacts the human experience, and all refer to the ways healing may be brought to bear on the shattered lives touched by these experiences. It is becoming, our existing toward the future, that is most deeply impacted by trauma.

I will suggest that embracing the and/and nature of aporia is that which moves persons from the unbecoming of trauma toward becoming more fully alive. In death and life, doubt and hope, fear and courage, the place of seeming impasse is ripe for embracing the duality of truth toward a new wholeness. This is, after all, the promise of the Christian faith: a kind of wholeness that has seen terrible atrocities and been reconciled to reasonable hope still and all. It represents a return to new first things, to a world God called, “*רֵאשֵׁת*.”¹⁰ This “very good(ness)” is that to which we may return in this life, should we choose it. The ultimate promise is that we have lived and moved and had our being in God, and we shall have those selfsame things again should we risk hoping in the God who has failed us. Marcel Gabriel offers “a metaphysic of hope,” which views the individual as *homo viator*, “a [person] on the way.”¹¹ This is one facet of reasonable hope, a hoping-toward-becoming.

Hovey and Amir write,

10. Gen 1:31, *BHS*.

11. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd & Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2010).

The hermeneutics of suffering prevents personal narratives from becoming “an exercise in alienation,” but rather as an invitation for humanizing conversations about suffering, where their unique qualities and characteristics are brought back interpretively into the world. We belong to our suffering; it humanizes all worldly activities through a common ‘rough-ground’ from which we can become more compassionate, generous and open to the experiences of others. A committed engagement between the researcher and the people who suffer, together becoming experienced about the many faces of suffering, deconstructing its complexity and thus co-creating a deeper understanding how to communicate, respond, share language, and learn from each other.¹²

To work with and write about trauma authentically means to engage a hermeneutic of suffering, whether implicitly or explicitly. Richard Kearney writes, “Hermeneutics goes all the way down.”¹³ I read through a hermeneutic of suffering which does, as Kearney supposes, “go all the way down” into every physiological response, every belief about the self, every interaction with God and one another. To use Hovey and Amir’s language, we see the embrace of personal experience, but not the individualization of it. By that I mean trauma is isolating by nature, and employing a hermeneutic of suffering acknowledges trauma responses vary but trauma’s effects are remarkably similar across persons. Embracing such a hermeneutic allows for diversity in unity, a common language around uncommon events, and compassionate understanding of the other.

To open counseling sessions and church meetings, I often ask my conversation partners, “How do you come today?” I come to this project as a theologian, trauma therapist, clergyperson, feminist, mother, daughter, and friend. I read through a process lens. I have been influenced deeply by the study of biblical Hebrew and, to a lesser

12. Rich B. Hovey & Nida Amir, “The Hermeneutics of Suffering: Researching Trauma,” *International Journal of Person Centered Medicine* 3, no. 2, 2013: 1.

13. Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 46.

degree, Koine Greek. I seek to steward my own trauma toward its healing and attend to the trauma of others in my professional roles. I recognize the privilege of being white, Christian, cisgender, heterosexual, well-educated, and middle-class. I have chosen as interlocutors, in large part, thinkers who lived through tumultuous times themselves. I chose Irenaeus and Augustine because they have been read into orthodoxy, even when close readings or their works evince, if not heterodox ideas, at least openings for such. I chose Heidegger, Tillich, and Marcel because they lived and wrote through the greatest tragedy of the modern era: the Shoah. I find their wrestling with philosophy through this period of loss of perceived order and goodness compelling. I find compelling, too, that they wrote as the Modern period gave way to the relative discomfiture of Postmodernism. In our contemporary moment in American Christianity, I believe we, too, are on a fulcrum of sorts, teetering between the death of the faith as we have known it and the new birth of fresh readings and applications from within the tradition.

One great challenge of work that plants itself firmly in two disciplines is the breadth of literature and themes to which one cannot attend. I intend this project to be educative but not exhaustive.¹⁴ My assumption is that most readers will have expertise in either theology or counseling, but not both. I hope readers will learn something about the discipline in which they are a non-specialist, recognizing I have sought not to overwhelm them with the full panoply of sources I would have engaged in a single-discipline project.

14. I am thinking here of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's work as a "totalizing project," claiming that totalization results in a lack of subjective particularity. Trauma is particular, of course, in the sense that it does not impact all persons, or even all traumatized persons, equally. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. & trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Likewise, this dissertation is necessarily limited in scope; therefore, some important themes are left unaddressed. I have not discussed, for example, the female mystics for whom God's overwhelming presence resulted in not only ecstasy, but also profound agony. Kearney writes, "Poetics makes hermeneutics possible."¹⁵ I have not written extensively on the poetics of trauma recovery, which is deserving of its own full-length project. Neither have I written here about those good persons for whom a return to faith seems impossible after trauma. I trust they are held in the bosom of the Holy, beloved just as they are. Nevertheless, I hope this work represents a fruitful opening to conversations around post-traumatic spirituality across disciplines.

To be a trauma therapist, and to write about theology as it relates to trauma, is to engage suffering on a level many people are never willing to countenance. Some years ago, the incomparable Diane Langberg gave a lecture for Christian trauma therapists I was fortunate to attend. I noted her words, perhaps slightly paraphrased due to the limitations of memory, "To engage with suffering is to sit with things that will wage war on the core of your faith." There may be times you feel discomfort while reading this project. There are difficult themes here, difficult ideas about the identities of humanity and the Holy in light of trauma. In this reading, you may feel unsettled enough to experience some sense of how traumatized persons feel every day. Sitting in the discomfort of trauma is a critical skill in working with trauma survivors. As a therapist, I would be remiss if I did not encourage you to use discretion in reading this project, taking breaks if you need to. As a theologian, I would love for you to engage with me and our interlocutors as we investigate what it can mean to be fully alive after trauma. As a

15. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 11.

pastor, I would love for these ideas to make their way into how you address your congregations and communities as you work with trauma survivors. Let us hear first from our inspiration.

Irenaeus as Constructive Trailhead

Therefore, the Son of the Father declares [Him] from the beginning, inasmuch as He was with the Father from the beginning, who did also show to the human race prophetic visions, and diversities of gifts, and His own ministrations, and the glory of the Father, in regular order and connection, at the fitting time for the benefit [of mankind]. For where there is a regular succession, there is also fixedness; and where fixedness, there suitability to the period; and where suitability, there also utility. And for this reason did the Word become the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men, for whom He made such great dispensations, revealing God indeed to men, but presenting man to God, and preserving at the same time the invisibility of the Father, lest man should at any time become a despiser of God, and that he should always possess something towards which he might advance; but, on the other hand, revealing God to men through many dispensations, lest man, falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist. *For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.* For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God.¹⁶

For Irenaeus, the glory of God must be grounded in the Father-Son relationship. That relationship is what allows for God to be glorified, by the following process: The Son declares the Father always to have been, and therefore himself always to have been. Because the Creator and Redeemer are co-eternal, Irenaeus posits, there is order in the world, revealed to, and by, the creation in Jesus the Christ. This is “fixedness,” which allows for “suitability,” as well as “utility.” That is, this order, or fixedness, makes the revelation of the Word suited to, and useful for, the revelation of the glory of God. In this way, and for this reason, the Word became, “the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men... revealing God indeed to men, but presenting man to God, and

16. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103420.htm>, italics supplied. Please note: God is without gender, and though my own language for the Holy is non-gendered (except occasionally in reference to the sources I reference), I have retained the language of my sources—in characterizations of God male and female—without alteration.

preserving... the invisibility of the Father... that he should always possess something towards which he might advance; but, on the other hand, revealing God to men through many dispensations, lest man... cease to exist.¹⁷" Let us attend briefly to the major moves of Irenaean theology in *Against Heresies* as an exemplar of perceived orthodoxy.

Cosmology

Bishop Matthew Steenberg writes, "Irenaeus of Lyon has earned the reputation of a theologian of creation."¹⁸ Of the creation event, Irenaeus wrote, "The rule of truth which we hold, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist."¹⁹ Irenaeus was clear that it was "He [who] is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor initial principle, nor power, nor pleroma" who created all that is. Contra the Platonic history of the term and the Gnostic usage thereof, Irenaeus calls God the *Demiurgo Deo* and the *Demiurgus* in books two and four of *Against Heresies*, respectively.²⁰ For Irenaeus, the Demiurge is the God of Israel. Hiestand writes, "Insofar as the demiurge is indeed the true and high God, what He has willfully and purposefully made is necessarily good and worthy of admiration."²¹

17. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:7.

18. Matthew Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 1.

19. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, I:22:1.

20. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses*, Vol. 1 [Greek and Latin], ed. W. Wigan. Harvey (Cambridge, England: Cantabrigiae, Typis Academicis, 1857), 251; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses*, Vol. 2 [Greek and Latin], ed. W. Wigan. Harvey (Cambridge, England: Cantabrigiae, Typis Academicis, 1857), 174.

The creation testifies to God's glory; specifically, God's being made manifest through the Christ is what sustains life. Irenaeus goes on to write that the Creator is revealed through the Word, and those who behold God through Christ receive life. For Irenaeus, truth's grounding was found in Jn 1:1, "The Word became flesh." Later in the text, in Book V, he wrote, "The only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through his transcendent love, became what we are, that he might bring us to be what he is himself."²² This echo of the beginning of the fourth Gospel draws us back to the first narrated beginning in the Judeo-Christian tradition, "In [the] beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."²³

For Irenaeus, the purpose of creation is to establish a relationship between God and the world. It is through the Christ this relationship becomes apparent and finds its fullness.

Anthropology

Kim writes, "The association of anthropology and Christology is very apparent in Irenaeus. The image of God that was imprinted upon Adam was not the perfect image of God; it prefigured the vaster process which began when the Word became flesh..." but will not be fulfilled until a person reaches full maturity in Christ. ²⁴

21. Gerald Hiestand, "And Behold It Was Very Good: St. Irenaeus' Doctrine of Creation," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 6, no. 1 (2019), 7.

22. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V:preface.

23. Gen 1:1. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *New Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

24. Dai Sil Kim, The Doctrine of Man in Irenaeus of Lyon (PhD diss., Boston University Graduate School), 117-118.

The purpose of humanity is found in God and has its beginning in creation. Here we find in Irenaeus a relational ontology: “It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God.”²⁵ As noted above, life for Irenaeus is reserved for those who are reconciled to God in Christ. In the Irenaean scheme, this has always been true, for there was no originary perfection as other theologians posited.

Genesis 1:26 says God made humanity in God’s image and likeness (וַיַּעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים בָּצָלָמָנוּ כְּמַוְתָּנוּ). The first humans, then, were not totally perfect because they were not “uncreated”— even before the advent of sin humanity had not reached its fullness. For Irenaeus, the image and the likeness are distinct aspects of humanness. The image of God is that which is imperfect but still part of every human, and is a reflection of Christ. The likeness, on the other hand, is that which is lost to sin. This likeness includes our capacity for God.²⁶

Only in Christ is the perfect image of humanity found. Irenaeus writes, “God having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One. For inasmuch as He had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the Being who saves should not exist in vain.”²⁷ In essence, the Godhead needs humanity to validate its own existence as a Being who saves.

25. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:5.

26. Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211-213.

27. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V:23:3.

Christology

Irenaeus' cosmology and anthropology find their center in the Incarnation. It is *in* Christ and *by* Christ that God makes dispensation for humankind. It is *in* Christ and *by* Christ that humans find their full humanness, what it means to be a self-in-relationship. Irenaeus's Christology testifies to his cosmology; that Christology leads the reader of the biblical text back to the Holy One who preexisted the world. One cannot overstate the importance of the Christ event in Irenaeus's theology.

For Irenaeus, and contra theologians who center blood atonement as the purpose and work of the cross, the Incarnation was not a result of sin. Rather, it was intended before creation as a means of deepening human relationship with God.²⁸ It was the love of God that resulted in the Incarnation. Of this, Irenaeus writes, "because of immeasurable love, he became what we are to bring us to be even what he is himself."²⁹ This idea is critical to Irenaeus's theology. In positing the Christ event as the design of God before sin entered the world, God affirms creation's value in and of itself.

It is through the Christ event that the likeness of humans to God is restored. Specifically, the obedience of Christ to God is that which makes possible human fellowship with God which is, as noted above, the very heart and end of human existence for Irenaeus.³⁰ The Incarnation is the means by which the fullness of God and the fullness of humanity meet and dwell as one. Facilitated by the world of the Spirit, the ministry of Christ is extended to humans so we, too, may join the Holy in transforming the world.

28. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III:18:1.

29. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V:Preface

30. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 211-213.

Soteriology

Salvation for Irenaeus comes through the “two hands of God,” namely the Word and the Spirit. He writes,

God will bestow salvation upon the whole nature of man, consisting of body and soul in close union, since the Word took it upon Him, and adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of whom our bodies are, and are termed, the temples.

Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God.³¹

These two hands of God created the universe and have reconciled people to God. Creation and salvation (i.e., re-creation) are always working together as two hands work the soil. The flesh of Jesus as the Christ makes visible some of the invisible God, as do the elements of bread and wine modernly. The Spirit enlivens those elements and makes Christ known through them. In what Donovan calls the “economy of salvation,” God creates all that is with God’s “two hands,” reveals Godself to creation in the Word and Wisdom that we might come alive; thus, the work of God will come to completion in the final resurrection.³²

For Irenaeus, creation and salvation cannot exist apart from one another. One may know God through God’s work in creation as facilitated by Word and the Spirit, both of whom act as mediators in “beholding God.” Donovan declares, “That gradual coming to

31. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V:6:1.

32. Mary Ann Donovan, “Alive to the Glory of God: A Key Insight in St. Irenaeus,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 296.

the vision of God is the call of the [human] race.”³³ These two hands, the Word and the Spirit, work together to restore (or literally “recreate”) the world.

Eschatology

For Irenaeus, the last things will represent more than simple restoration, rather a participatory exchange between God and humans. Osborn writes, “The corruptible is absorbed by incorruption and the mortal by immortality.”³⁴ Further, that which is invisible will become visible, that which is incomprehensible, comprehensible, that which impassable, passable. The final gift of God is Godself (V:36:3). The participatory exchange follows, as one would expect from a thinker steeped in Platonism, an ascent/descent model, whereby God-in-Christ descends and humans ascend.³⁵

This participatory exchange also affects the mortal body. As part of Christ’s descent and human ascension, the human body will be revivified. For those who are granted this revivification, “...that flesh shall also be found fit for and capable of receiving the power of God, which at the beginning received the skillful touches of God.”³⁶ Irenaeus goes on, “The flesh, therefore, is not destitute [of participation] in the constructive wisdom and power of God.”³⁷ Irenaeus argues that flesh, which is accustomed to living, should continue doing in eternal life what it has done in this

33. Mary Ann Donovan, “Alive to the Glory of God,” 296.

34. Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 260; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III:19:1.

35. Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 261.

36. Irenaeus of Lyons, V:3:2.

37. Irenaeus of Lyons, V:3:3.

temporal one. He closes his argument on the nature of mortal flesh in the eternal realm with these words:

For that the flesh can really partake of life, is shown from the fact of its being alive; for it lives on, as long as it is God's purpose that it should do so. It is manifest, too, that God has the power to confer life upon it, inasmuch as He grants life to us who are in existence. And, therefore, since the Lord has power to infuse life into what He has fashioned, and since the flesh is capable of being quickened, what remains to prevent its participating in incorruption, which is a blissful and never-ending life granted by God?³⁸

Yet there is a distinctly apophatic quality to Irenaeus' eschatology. Boersma notes that the *visio Dei* has increased from of old: through the prophets, to the Incarnation, and will culminate in “the eschatological vision of God in eternal life.”³⁹

Thus grounded, Irenaeus' vision of God's glory and the human response thereto makes the famous line, “The glory of God is the living man, and the life of man consists in beholding God,” more powerful. In the final vision, Osborn writes, all things are recapitulated “in Christ, through whom prophets and apostles are joined. Yet divine Intellect, economy and recapitulation cannot be seen in abstract. The beholder must fall to prayer and by faith share, participate, in the glory which God gives in exchange for the humanity which God shares in Christ.”⁴⁰ This move will correspond with receiving both the image and likeness of God, the latter of which was lost to sin. Yet while Irenaeus describes the qualities of relationship between humanity and the Holy, he lacks a more specific eschatological vision. We know he expected the material world to disappear and

38. Irenaeus of Lyons, V:3:3.

39. Hans Boersma, “Irenaeus, Derrida, and Hospitality: On the Eschatological Overcoming of Violence,” *Modern Theology*, 19, no. 2 (2003), 171.

40. Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 263.

for humans to “pass into God,”⁴¹ (i.e., for theosis to occur), but Irenaeus struggled to proffer a more robust vision of what is to come. This ineffable quality, far from being problematic, opens space for a recapitulation of eschatological truth into a more modern contextual understanding.

Grounded in the major moves of Irenaean theology, specifically as an exemplar of orthodoxy, we will later consider whether and how these ideas have clinical and theological utility toward a post-traumatic spirituality. First, however, we must consider what it means to be a self, an individual who is a part of, but distinct from, other persons, for it is only by understanding what it means to be a self that we may come to understand ourselves. Let us turn, then, to some historical understandings of selfhood.

41. Boersma, “Irenaeus, Derrida, and Hospitality,” 171.

A Brief Historical Sketch of Selfhood

The idea of the “self” has been treated variously from antiquity to the present day as both philosophical and theological movements have developed. Since trauma changes the way persons understand themselves, is a hermeneutical shift needed better to encompass self-understanding after trauma? To answer that, one must first have a basic grasp of the history of the meaning of selfhood and what it encompasses.

In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor’s seminal text, he discusses three facets of selfhood. These include “the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths,” “the affirmation of ordinary life which develops from the early modern period,” and “the expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source.”⁴² Over against this, *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity*, published in 2018, brings a specifically-Christian lens to bear on Taylor’s otherwise secular study of selfhood.⁴³ These two volumes offer sketches of the ways in which selfhood was understood for the thinkers included below.

For the purposes of this project, the voices selected are those whose work most deeply impact it, especially as it relates to selfhood in a Judeo-Christian milieu. Jeremiah’s prophetic work will serve as we sketch a pastoral response to trauma, particularly communal trauma. It would be difficult to understand the milieu out of which Christianity—and indeed Western thought for centuries—developed without having some

42. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), x.

43. James M. Houston & Hans Zimmerman, *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2018).

grasp of Plato. Augustine's contributions to Christian theology-turned-orthodoxy cannot be overstated and inform the theodicean and eucharistic work to come. Filling the millennium-and-a-half-long gap from Augustine to Martin Buber are two modern philosophers, Descartes and Locke. It is in modernity that "the turn to oneself is now also and inescapably a turn to oneself in the first-person perspective—a turn to the self as a self."⁴⁴ They are included because their work is important even if it does not speak to the purposes of this project, namely, grounding the work that follows in the ideas of the self-in-relationship of those whom I draw upon most extensively in other places. Buber, having lived through the Shoah as a Jewish existentialist, offers a critical relational philosophy. A brief sketch of each individual is offered below.

The Prophet Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah understood himself to be part of a people, a nation. Further, the text of Jeremiah yields many clues about the prophet's self-understanding, and may help us consider the construct of selfhood in an Ancient Near Eastern context. He knew himself to be one to whom the word of the Lord came (Jer 1:2); that is, a prophet. He knew himself to be the son of a priest and therefore was a priest himself. Thus, he would have had access to the Temple and its attendant liturgies and would have known them from among his first memories.⁴⁵ What is perhaps most remarkable about Jeremiah's self-identity, however, is the way it changes throughout his lifetime from one who led the Temple rituals to one who prophesied to bring people to repentance and, finally, to one

44. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 176.

45. Bruce K. Waltke, "Jeremiah: How the prophet self-identified" in *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity*, eds. James M. Houston & J. Zimmermann (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018) 54-65.

who lamented the destruction of Israel due, in the prophet's mind, to Judah's unfaithfulness.

When Jeremiah is called by God, he understands himself to be part of a generation under God's wrath.⁴⁶ God's call through Jeremiah, then, is to encourage Israel to repent, to turn from their ways and remember God's saving acts in the Exodus account (Jer 2:6-7). In Hebrew, the word repent is בִּשׁוּעָה, meaning to turn or return. For two decades, Jeremiah called God's people to repent, to *return* to the "ancients paths...the good way" of living under Torah, God's instruction for being selves in a community (Jer 6:16).

Yet in 605 BCE, when Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's puppet king and the Babylonian captivity began in earnest, Jeremiah's message shifted from covenant faithfulness to impending doom. There would be no saving this people from what was to come. Jeremiah received God's message and spoke it to the people, and this speaking took many forms. Certainly, in some cases, the speech was literal. In other cases, the speech was symbolic. For example, Jeremiah wore first a wooden yoke around his neck, then replaced it with one fashioned of iron (Jer 27-28).

Brueggemann illuminates the weeping prophet's grief. Surely, he was grieved by the condition of Israel. Yet Brueggemann suggests there was a psychic toll on Jeremiah due to the nation's unbelief. That is, that Jeremiah saw so clearly the destruction to come and his warnings going unheeded for so long it *cost him* something.⁴⁷ When one bears in

46. Waltke, "Jeremiah," 55.

47. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* 40th anniv. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018), 46-48.

one's bones a burning message that goes ignored in favor of shoring up antiquated self-understanding and aggrandizement (individually or collectively), it causes harm. Jeremiah has only one adequate metaphor to describe what is happening to God's beloved: "Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."⁴⁸ Jeremiah understood himself to be a messenger of God to the people. He spent his days proclaiming in word and deed the ruination of his beloved nation and calling them back to relationship with the Holy One by whatever means necessary.

Plato

No thinker's work had more impact on early Christianity than that of Plato, given that Christianity developed in a deeply Platonic milieu.⁴⁹ For Plato, one gains self-mastery through thought or reason. To be good is to have mastered oneself (Greek κρείττον αὐτοῦ).⁵⁰ In Platonic thought, to have mastered the self means to have the higher, immaterial part of the soul rule over the lower or material parts that reign over desires. When reason rules, souls enjoy self-unity, calm, and self-possession. By contrast, souls ruled by lower desires are said to be in a "civil war," living in a state of perpetual agitation, unrest, craving, and endless desire.⁵¹

48. Jer 31:15

49. In this brief section, I am engaging with Plato proper rather than Platonisms. That is, I recognize the way in which the Christian development of *Logos* (discussed more fully in chap. 8) tracks with Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism and is later influenced by Stoicism and the Jewish Wisdom tradition. It is not my intention to engage them so much as provide a starting point for what was a critical philosophical movement for the Christian milieu.

50. Plato, *The Republic*, <https://ryanfb.github.io/loebulus-data/L237.pdf>, 376.

Self-mastery allows for centered, rational reflection, wherein one can survey and understand others: this is communication. The soul as a single locus of thought and feeling is “an essential concomitant of the morality of rational hegemony.”⁵² The soul must enjoy unicity if one is to reach the highest level of reason, which brings about the previously-described states of order, concord, and harmony.⁵³

The means to self-mastery, again, is reason. In Platonic thought proper, reason is one’s capacity both to see and understand. To be rational is to perceive order, for if one truly sees order, one cannot be mistaken about reality. This is not a solitary task, however, for to be reasoned is to participate in the Idea of the Good, the final good, in which all partial goods partake.⁵⁴ A person is turned toward reason only when it has been “illuminated by the Good.”⁵⁵ To have a good life is to be ruled by reason, which is to see the good order of the whole, which is to perceive the Good, which is to love what is eternal.

One who loves what is eternal will be morally good precisely because the love of order brings about order.⁵⁶ For Plato, becoming rational is not so much about what takes place within individuals, but rather that which connects us to the larger order in which we have been placed. The force undergirding that connection is *Logos*, a pre-existent rational

51. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 116.

52. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 120.

53. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 115.

54. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 122.

55. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 124.

56. Thomas Brickhouse & Nicholas D. Smith, “Plato (427—347 B.C.E.)” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/plato/>

order present in the cosmos and the individual person (more on *Logos* in chapter 8). The individual who participates in *Logos* is ordered because that one perceives that which already exists in the Good and is converted by it. That one moves away from what is bodily and changing and toward what is immaterial and eternal.⁵⁷

Augustine

Augustinian thought is steeped in, but diverges from, his Neoplatonic milieu. For Augustine, the universe is an “external realization of a rational order.”⁵⁸ The created world participates in God’s order, and seeing and loving that order is the end of reason. Yet for Augustine, love—not attention—is that which moves an individual toward an end. Still expressed in dialectical terms, Augustine views human decision-making as moving toward one of two ends: charity or concupiscence.⁵⁹ The mechanism by which one is moved is different—whereas for Plato one must perceive rightly (i.e., with the eye, the highest of the senses) to participate in the Good, Augustine focuses on interiority. The Bishop writes, “Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.”⁶⁰

This shift toward interiority represents a significant, directional difference between Plato and Augustine. This internal gaze allows one to begin a “mystical ascent” through that which is material toward that which is spiritual; love is the vehicle by which

57. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 123-215.

58. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 128.

59. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 128.

60. Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine of Hippo: Earlier Writings*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953), XXXIX.72.

the ascent is begun.⁶¹ For Augustine, the ascent to the self has primarily to do with pilgrimage and confession.⁶² Much like Abraham, the individual lives in a foreign land and the goal of life is to move toward the God who exists above what is visible. Thus, Augustine situates that which is ultimate outside of known time and space; this is an eschatological move. The individual and the church both move toward the heavenly city, Jerusalem. Augustine writes, “For he who has his most lofty home in a secret place also has a tent on earth. His tent is the Church, the Church which is still a pilgrim.”⁶³ The pilgrim—both individually and collectively as the Church—is far from God but journeying toward the Holy.

Thus, there is for Augustine an individual and collective selfhood, joined by the divinity of Christ. It is important to note that in Augustinian thought, the Church is the locus of collective selfhood, not the whole world. Believing in Jesus as the Christ is both the goal and the means of attaining the goal. In Christ, the pilgrim is able to confess sin. Confession allows Christ to receive the person into his body, by which one enters the heavenly Jerusalem.⁶⁴ One among many of Augustine’s contributions to the formation of the Christian faith is his origination of “that strand of Western spirituality which has sought the certainty of God within.”⁶⁵

61. Paul C. Burns, “Augustine of Hippo: The Christian Life, Then and Now” in *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity*, eds. James M. Houston & Jens Zimmermann (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 209-222.

62. Burns, “Augustine of Hippo,” 216-217.

63. Augustine of Hippo, “Exposition on Psalm 41,” trans. J. E. Tweed, New Advent. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801041.htm>

64. Burns, “Augustine of Hippo,” 222.

65. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 140.

A Shift to Rationalist Individualism

Between Augustine and Buber, to whom we will look next, a millennium and a half pass. While a protracted discussion of individualism is contrary to the purposes of this project, it is nevertheless important to the development of selfhood as a construct. Therefore, I offer below a brief look at the turn to individualism in Descartes and Locke as a bridge from antiquity to modernity.

René Descartes (1596-1650 CE) was a French philosopher schooled in the thinking of famous philosophers, including Plato and Augustine, during his childhood. Refusing to accept other philosophers' works as authoritative, he set out to rid himself of any ideas except those which may be clearly deduced. And deduce Descartes did; he stripped his philosophical understandings down to the barest component of knowing: his own cognitions. Taylor writes that Augustine anticipates Descartes at several points, including the idea that "the route to the higher passes within," a "proto-cogito," the "conception of innate ideas," and the idea that the "soul is better known to itself than the body."⁶⁶ The Cartesian démarche lay in the internalization of the moral source. That is, for Descartes, the locus of moral strength lay inside the self. Thus, the turn to inwardness, anticipated by Augustine, becomes more apparent in Descartes. This radical move to individualism comes about, of course, as Descartes considers epistemology, how he can *know*. From Descartes' experience of himself as a thinking being, he concocted the following proof: *Cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am.⁶⁷ In the third of Descartes' 12

66. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 139-141.

67. Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), 34.

rules, he writes that one can only know for oneself what one can “intuit or deduce with certainty.”⁶⁸ This means of deduction, Descartes is certain, “will result in substantively true beliefs about the world.”⁶⁹ Taylor writes, “...for Descartes, the whole point of the reflexive turn is to develop quite a self-sufficient certainty” to meet not God, but the self within.⁷⁰

John Locke (1632-1704), an empiricist successor of Descartes, accepted Descartes’ position that knowledge is found in the mind rather than outside the human person and, what’s more, that knowledge is not knowledge unless the individual develops it for herself.⁷¹ He presses rationalism quite a bit farther than Descartes, suggesting that, at birth, the mind is *tabula rasa*, to be written upon by the sensations of life’s experiences. All beliefs, then, are *a posteriori*. This “writing” happens via sensory apperception. These experiences produce ideas, and the use of reason can assist in expanding one’s knowledge on the basis of said ideas. Taylor writes, “... his [Locke’s] formulations of [individualism and the mind as a tabula rasa] became normative for broad movements of thought in the eighteenth century.”⁷²

68. The full quote reads, “Concerning objects proposed for study, we ought to investigate what we can clearly and evidently intuit or deduce with certainty, and not what other people have thought or what we ourselves conjecture. For knowledge can be attained in no other way.” René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol 1., trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, & Dugald Murdoch (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13.

69. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 156.

70. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 156.

71. Locke writes, “So much as we our selves consider and comprehend of Truth and Reason, so much we possess of real and true Knowledge. The floating of other Mens Opinions in our brains makes us knot a jot more knowing, though they happen to be true.” Michael Huemer & Robert Audi, eds., *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (London, England: Routledge, 2008), 219.

72. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 307.

Even Kant, who paved the way for a priori beliefs with his categories and significantly different conception of the mind from the *tabula rasa*, still embraced the individualistic nature of the person and the epistemic task. Many thinkers, including the phenomenologists and existentialists, resisted in their own ways this ruggedly rationalist framework. It was not until Martin Buber, writing two centuries after Locke, however, that a significantly compelling conception of the self as a being-in-relationship and a thoroughgoing communal understanding of personhood were developed.

Buber

For Buber, a self-described philosophical anthropologist, “Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings.”⁷³ That is, relationships are pedagogical means by which one learns one’s finitude, sees the truth, and experiences confirmation. In this space, “I” recognize another as “Thou” rather than “It.”⁷⁴ Yet Buber not only recognizes individual-to-individual relationships; he also recognized there exists a “We”—that which connects us to others, facilitates communication vis-à-vis the *Logos* (much like Plato), and reveals our common values.⁷⁵

Regarding interpersonal situations, Buber believes one must not think merely of the Thou as having an experience, but as having the experience the Thou is having at the moment of meeting. That is, the responsibility of the I is to imagine deeply the experience of the Thou, to come into contact with that Thou’s reality in process in the

73. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 148. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010), 69.

74. Buber, *I and Thou*, 12.

75. Buber, *I and Thou*, 40-41.

moment of meeting. The Thou is “becoming a self with me” when the Thou is also in that one’s self, which facilitates the process of the other’s “self-becoming.”⁷⁶ Of course, this does not mean merging into another person or abandoning oneself. Rather, it means recognizing the mutual possibility that arises in the moment of meeting.

Perhaps most critical to the purpose of this chapter is the dialogue between Buber and Carl Rogers in the appendix of the text. For Buber, every relationship between persons begins with accepting the other.⁷⁷ Yet accepting is not precisely the same as *confirming* in Buber’s lexicon. Confirming means not only accepting the person in that moment, but also accepting the “whole potentiality” of that other.⁷⁸ He uses the example of spouses: accepting the other does not mean desiring the other to remain static and unchanging. Rather, it means “Just by my accepting love, I discover in you what you are meant to become.”⁷⁹ One hears the resonance between Buber and Catherine Keller’s later assertion that our lives—human, divine, and even planetary—are constantly enfolding, that we are “becoming-in-relation.”⁸⁰ For Buber, “the inborn Thou is expressed in each relation, but it is consummated only in the direct relation with the Eternal Thou.”⁸¹ Buber’s God is found in all, for there is nowhere God is not. He goes on, “God is the

76. Buber, *I and Thou*, 71.

77. Buber, *I and Thou*, 181.

78. Buber, *I and Thou*, 182.

79. Buber, *I and Thou*, 182.

80. Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 40.

81. Maurice S. Friedman. *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* 4th ed., and expanded [Ebook] (London, England: Routledge, 2002), chap. 12.

Being that is directly, most nearly, and lastingly over against us that may be properly only be addressed, not expressed.”⁸²

Selfhood has been explicated in various ways across the two and a half millennia covered in these sketches. Yet in one’s work and life, there is some degree of connection between an individual’s self-understanding and the broader community in which one lives. With this grounding, we turn to better understanding the self who has experienced trauma.

82. Buber, *I and Thou*, 80.

The Traumatized Self

How is one to understand the self who has been traumatized? Theologian Shelly Rambo defines trauma as “the suffering that does not go away” and considers traumatology “the study of what remains.”⁸³ In Rambo’s conceptualization, then, trauma results in altered relationships with the concepts of time, body, and word. I suggest, as an umbrella under which all three are subsumed, the idea that becoming, too, is impacted by these alterations. For the purposes of this project, trauma refers to an event or series of events that exceeds the human person’s capacity to cope, resulting in long-term neurobiological changes. Tumminio Hansen writes, “A traumatic event, as viewed through a psychological lens, is traumatic because, from the perspective of the sufferer, it instantiates an epistemic crisis.”⁸⁴ Self-understanding is, therefore, necessarily impacted by trauma. In this chapter, we will look at how trauma is written about in the diagnostic literature; discuss Rambo’s categories and solution; and turn to the idea of becoming as the category under which time, body, and word are subsumed.

The Problem of Trauma

The overarching problem trauma creates is an inability to continue becoming beyond the experience. The word “trauma” means many things within and across theological and psychological contexts. The English word “trauma” comes from the

83. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 15.

84. Danielle Tumminio Hansen, “Remembering Rape in Heaven: A Constructive Proposal for Memory and the Eschatological Self,” *Modern Theology* (Advanced publication article; 2020): 14.

Greek *τραῦμα*, meaning “to wound or damage.”⁸⁵ While traumatic events do not necessarily, or even normally, result in a psychological disorder, those that do can seem impossible to overcome. Cathy Caruth notes, “the traumatized... carry an impossible story within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess.”⁸⁶

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) represents a shift in understanding of trauma in that trauma- and stressor-related disorders has become a separate chapter of the text. Aside from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), other trauma and stressor-related disorders in the DSM-5 include reactive attachment disorder, which has to do with a child’s emotional withdrawal toward a primary caregiver; disinhibited social engagement disorder, which has to do with a child’s fearlessness toward strangers; and acute stress disorder, which is a precursor to PTSD and is different from PTSD primarily in the time that has elapsed since the traumatic event.⁸⁷ All trauma- and stressor-related disorders are linked by the presence of a traumatic event as a primary diagnostic criterion. The best-known trauma and stressor-related disorder is PTSD, which has a lifetime prevalence of around 10 percent in the United States.⁸⁸ PTSD is well-researched and has a robust body of empirical data surrounding it, which is why I have chosen to ground our discussion of trauma in it rather

85. Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 12.

86. Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 5.

87. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, 265-90.

88. Arieh Shalev, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Stress Related Disorders,” *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 32, no. 3 (2009): 687–704.

than one of the other conditions listed above. For the purposes of understanding trauma-related psychological disorders from a clinical standpoint, I have included the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Those symptoms include:

- A. Direct exposure to a traumatic event, including death, actual serious injury, natural disaster, or actual sexual violence.
- B. Re-experiencing in the form of intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional distress after exposure to traumatic reminders, and physical reactivity after exposure to traumatic reminders.
- C. Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, including thoughts, feelings, and reminders of the event(s).
- D. Negative thoughts or feelings, such as overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world, exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma, negative affect, decreased interest in activities, feeling isolated, difficulty experiencing positive affects.
- E. Trauma-related arousal and reactivity, including irritability or aggression, destructive behavior, hypervigilance, heightened startle reaction, difficulty concentrating, and difficulty sleeping.
- F. Symptoms must persist for more than 30 days.
- G. The individual must experience significant distress or functional impairment.
- H. The symptoms must not be a result of medication, substance abuse, or another physical ailment.⁸⁹

The effects of trauma have been studied extensively, some of which are discussed below. Emotional dysregulation⁹⁰ (i.e., feeling too much) or numbing (i.e., feeling too little) are primary outworkings of PTSD. Somatization refers to the way in which psychological distress is manifested in the body. For some trauma survivors, psychic pain is expressed in bodily ailments. This may include chronic headache or backache, insomnia, digestive and elimination problems, and hyperarousal to name a few. Further,

89. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, 271-72.

90. Dysregulation may be defined as, “Reactivity to and an unhealthy response to stress, including when people have temper tantrums, act out violently and abusively, or have to live with the aftereffects of unhealed trauma and dissociation.” Sarah Peyton, *Your Resonant Self: Guided Meditations and Exercises to Engage Your Brain’s Capacity for Healing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 290.

cognitive processing often changes, resulting in cognitive errors, excessive guilt, intrusive thoughts, and can cause hallucinations and delusions.⁹¹

When the trauma occurs on the developmental timeline often has a profound impact on the way trauma is processed; young children and older adults are at the greatest risk for long-term symptoms. For young children, common symptoms of trauma include nightmares, trauma play (i.e., reenacting the event in the child's play), behavioral regression, and lack of ability to concentrate in school. Older adults may have difficulty sleeping, become increasingly agitated, isolate or withdraw more frequently, and increase substance use. Trauma- and stressor-related disorders are highly comorbid with other disorders, particularly substance use disorders.⁹²

Those special populations considered, the kind of trauma one experiences seems to have clinical significance with regard to the eventual development of PTSD. Studies consistently show interpersonal traumas have a higher likelihood of resulting in PTSD than natural disasters, with sexual trauma and physical assault having the highest correlation between an event and later diagnosis.⁹³ Because trauma is diagnosed based on a complex interplay of physical, emotional, and time-related factors, it is difficult to generalize its effects on a given individual. Yet what is important to understand is that because trauma serves to change the way individuals understand themselves and the

91. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). “Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services” (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [US], 2014), 59-90.

92. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). “Trauma-Informed Care,” 65.

93. Jeffery Guina, Ramzi Nahhas, Paige Sutton, & Seth Farnsworth, “The Influence of Trauma Type and Timing on PTSD Symptoms,” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* Issue: 206, no. 1 (January 2018): 72–76.

world, both psychological and theological responses are necessary to help persons live and behold God again.

What neuropsychologists are beginning to understand is the specific mechanisms by which trauma operates on a neuronal level. Traumatic stress results in neurobiological changes at the loci of these stress responses. Trauma is understood to impact specific brain regions, including the limbic system and the medial prefrontal cortex (PFC).⁹⁴ Research shows that trauma changes the brain: the limbic system is more sensitized and the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis is more sensitive to cortisol level fluctuations. Neurotransmitter levels change as well.

When a perceived life-threatening stimulus is present, the amygdala, part of the limbic system involved in the “emotional valence” of events, responds by flooding the body with cortisol, enacting the fight-flight-or-freeze response, subsequently flooding the system with adrenaline. The PFC “goes offline” and the brain stem—the primal survival portion of the brain—takes over. When there is too much cortisol in the system, the hippocampus is “short-circuited,” making normal memory storage impossible. In a normal event, sensory information collected by the thalamus and amygdala, filtered through the PFC, and stored in the hippocampus. In a trauma event, the meaning-making function of the PFC, an area associated with “verbal declarative memory”⁹⁵ is bypassed, disallowing for the memory to be stored in the hippocampus as an integrated experience. What that means, practically, is the event cannot be recalled in a seamless, narrative

94. Guina, Nahhas, Sutton, & Farnsworth, “Trauma Type and Timing,” 75.

95. Guina, Nahhas, Sutton, & Farnsworth, “Trauma Type and Timing,” 74.

format. Rather, it is recalled as fragments of sensory input that can be triggered by any stimulus similar to that of the trauma event.

The more frequently these triggers activate the limbic system, the stronger the neural pathway between a trigger and a trauma response becomes. When the system is activated repeatedly, trauma responses become *de facto* responses, even when there is no real danger present.

The Impact of Trauma on the Self

Cathy Caruth calls trauma “a double wound,” a wound “that is not fully assimilated as it occurs” and “that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.”⁹⁶ While this definition is narrower than those one finds in the psychological literature, it is nonetheless sufficient for our discussion at the intersection of trauma and theology, when trauma is understood to refer both to something that exceeds a person’s ability to cope with an experience or series of experiences *and* has effects beyond the event itself. Or, put more colloquially, Diane Langberg writes, “Trauma is extraordinary, you see, not because it rarely happens, but because it swallows up and destroys normal human ways of living.”⁹⁷ In Rambo’s conceptualization, trauma results in altered relationships with the concepts of time, body, and word. I offer, as an umbrella under which all three are subsumed, the idea that becoming, too, is impacted by these alterations. A discussion of each follows.

96. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3-5.

97. Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015), 6.

Time

Rambo asserts, “The central problem of trauma is a temporal one.”⁹⁸ In fact, the single most defining feature of trauma is the way in which it disrupts a linear understanding of, and living into, time. In trauma, the death experienced in the past, whether literal or figurative, invades the present and spoils the future: this is its primary power. She asserts, “death returns in an unrecognizable and ungrasped form; life then becomes a perplexing encounter and continual engagement with death.”⁹⁹

Another facet of the disruption of time is suspension in the temporal space of the trauma. The individual continues to age chronologically, but usually fails to develop emotionally in a continued, relatively-linear fashion past the traumatic event. Rambo writes, “...the past event...enters into the present in a way that confuses a trajectory of past, present, and future.”¹⁰⁰

Hopelessness is a common problem for persons who have experienced trauma. Neurobiologically, this is a result of the limbic system having acute sensitivity to stimuli that resemble those of the trauma event. Anything that smacks of those trauma memories is classified by the brain as a threat, and therefore the system goes into hypervigilance as a matter of course.¹⁰¹ When the “emergency notification system” of the brain is chronically activated, positive affects become so unfamiliar as to become uncomfortable, if not impossible to experience. This leads many survivors seek to control everything in

98. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 19.

99. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

100. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

101. Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2010), 39-72.

their lives as a way to limit the constant upheaval. Rambo writes, “Any planning capacity becomes centered on protecting oneself from being triggered by the past.”¹⁰² If one controls one’s environment, there are fewer opportunities for the past to bleed into the present. Time ceases to have a linear function. Past, present, and future elide into a single, continuous loop; neither is distinct, all are terrifying.

Body

As Bessel van der Kolk writes, “The body keeps the score.”¹⁰³ The effects of trauma continue from the inside, the body witnessing to what one cannot testify in words. Every time the limbic system is reactivated, the survivor rides the waves of the trauma once more.

The process by which the fight, flight, or freeze mechanism works is fairly simple. Alarm registers in the amygdala, part of the limbic system, and alerts the individual to act. The problem occurs when the system becomes hypersensitive due to repetitive activation. In this case, the limbic system is no longer able effectively to communicate stimuli to the prefrontal cortex, where language is formed, to speak the trauma and assign meaning to the trauma event and, by extension, other life events.¹⁰⁴ When the brain cannot assign meaning, the trauma event is stored in fragments rather than as a cohesive whole. The work of trauma therapy, then, is to help all parts of the memory integrate in narrative form.

102. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

103. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2014).

104. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 19.

Peter Levine calls the continual reactivation of the fight-or-flight mechanism the “fear/immobility cycle”: the system is aroused by a stimulus, there is an unsuccessful attempt at escape, which leads to the experience of fear and helplessness, which results in immobilization that occurs whenever similar stimuli to the original trauma are encountered.¹⁰⁵ Levine goes on, “This last-ditch immobilization system is meant to function *acutely and only for brief periods*. When chronically activated, humans become trapped in the gray limbo of nonexistence, where one is neither *really* living nor *actually* dying.”¹⁰⁶

Trauma triggers are often difficult to identify, as any stimulus similar to the trauma, or even the rise of a feeling—somatic or emotional—the individual felt during the trauma, can trigger PTSD symptoms. For example, a person who has experienced the sounds of war can be triggered by fireworks or a car backfiring. What is more, even feeling anxious like one might have during the trauma can trigger dissociation in an individual. Dissociation is defined as any break in a person’s self-identity, memory, consciousness, or awareness of understanding.¹⁰⁷ The result is a feeling of being disconnected from oneself and the surrounding world. Since we are “grounded in the world through our bodies,”¹⁰⁸ losing that grounding is akin to losing the self.

105. Levine, *Unspoken Voice*, 21.

106. Levine, *Unspoken Voice*, 105, italics retained.

107. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). “Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services,” 69.

108. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

Word

Like time and body, word falls away in trauma. This is because, as noted above, the prefrontal cortex “goes offline” in trauma while the limbic system directs the brain stem to control bodily responses. Rambo notes “... trauma is an unknowing, unclaimed, unassimilable, unsayable experience.”¹⁰⁹ She specifies, “...trauma has its own language—the language of the unsayable.” Given that the prefrontal cortex is responsible for assigning language and therefore making meaning, it stands to reason that not only is trauma unspeakable, trauma is also unimaginable.¹¹⁰ The most difficult traumatic loss is the loss of meaning. One continues to exist in a space where “the world is gone”¹¹¹ and what remains often does not seem sufficient to warrant survival. The unnamed horror of the unspeakable trauma is its constancy, the fear that it will never end. Brueggemann writes, “Where there is no speech, we must live in despair. And exile is first of all where our speech has been silenced and God’s speech has been banished.”¹¹²

The interplay between disruptions of time, body, and word is most apparent with respect to how trauma impacts narrative memory.¹¹³ Trauma memories seem never to end, when the end is conceived of as “the final installment in a chronological

109. Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), loc. 155, Kindle.

110. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21.

111. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21.

112. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 69.

113. Bessel van der Kolk & Onno van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1995), 163.

narrative,”¹¹⁴ for in trauma, the experience cannot be organized in narrative form.

Narrative memory is how individuals organize time. Yet in trauma, the normal mechanism by which memory operates in the brain is disrupted, fragmenting meaning-making.

Crites explicates, “Without memory, in fact, experience would have no coherence at all. Consciousness would be locked in a bare, momentary present, i.e., in a disconnected succession of perceptions which it would have no power to relate to one another.”¹¹⁵ He goes on, “Our sense of personal identity depends upon the continuity of experience through time, a continuity bridging even the cleft between remembered past and projected future. Even when it is largely implicit, not vividly self-conscious, our sense of ourselves is at every moment to some extent integrated into a single story.”¹¹⁶

Van der Kolk and van der Hart write that, in normal narrative memory, memory serves a social function. Yet traumatic memory, “...has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody; ... it is a solitary activity.”¹¹⁷ Trauma “cannot be organized on a linguistic level,” and therefore the normal process of arranging sensory experiences into symbolic ones is subverted.¹¹⁸ The impact on word is clear. When we do not experience the passage of time as others do, when our bodies respond to any stimulus similar to the trauma as a threat, and when we cannot communicate what has happened to us, we

114. Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 86.

115. Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume XXXIX, Issue 3, September 1971, 298, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XXXIX.3.291>.

116. Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” 302.

117. Van der Kolk & van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 163.

118. Van der Kolk & van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 172-173.

cannot become as we are meant to do. Healing from trauma, then, requires reuniting time, body, and word. For Rambo, the way forward is a middle way.

The Middle

The link between trauma and its healing is witness in Rambo's conception. The problem of trauma, Rambo says, citing Cathy Caruth, is the "collapse of witnessing."¹¹⁹ Because it is neurobiologically impossible for the brain to see and process the trauma event fully, and because the past constantly spoils the present with its invasion, trauma is best read through "the gaps and fissures" in texts.¹²⁰ In witness, words are employed to do the necessary but insufficient work of ensuring tragedy is not elided or forgotten. Witness is not synonymous with healing, however. Rather, witness is the fulcrum linking the shattering and remaking, the undoing and the regeneration; it is the hinge between death and life and is experienced through being present to trauma and traumatic survival.¹²¹ One might say witness inhabits the liminal space between trauma and its recovery. Witness, then, is what survives death, and love is what remains.¹²²

Witness, in this case, refers not only to speaking and listening but also to "a process of handing over and receiving an experience that continually refuses straightforward communication yet bears within it the force of an imperative."¹²³ To bear

119. Cathy Caruth, introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 10.

120. Rambo is referring here to written texts, of course, but the application of reading (or hearing) these gaps and fissures is a component of witnessing when face-to-face with a person who has experienced trauma. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 27-31.

121. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 40.

122. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 131.

123. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 23.

witness is to bear a “relationship to radical suffering,” to do the impossible work of trying to imagine that which is unimaginable.¹²⁴ Rambo contends, “a testimony to the middle runs alongside narratives of redemption, revealing new theological responses to traumatic suffering and pressing the edges of redemption in search of new vocabulary and images for framing our lives.”¹²⁵ Rambo goes on to write that the call to witnessing is a call toward the middle. This middle is a place between life and death in which the Spirit of God figures as that which remains after death. Rambo reads in the Gospel of John that the Spirit, as paraclete, “provides a critical link between past, present, and future.”¹²⁶ The paraclete remains as both the promise of Christ's presence and the reminder of his absence.¹²⁷ Loving, remaining, and abiding consist not in that which proves victorious over death, but that which *continues* even so. Death's reality is inescapable, its grip unloosing. Yet, Rambo contends, Spirit-love bears witness to the depths of unspeakability in its presence. The call for humanity, then, is the call toward deep witnessing. But is that enough?

For Rambo, witness is that which begins a process of reuniting time, body, and word. It draws survivor and hearer into an intimate circle of deep courage and shared pain. Rambo cites Simone Weil's call to hear the mute cry, a “cry so deep and so repulsive that it is locked within the one who experiences it.”¹²⁸ The work is to hear this unspeakable cry, encounter it courageously, and meet the terrifying middle space without

124. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 23.

125. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 151.

126. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 103.

128. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 150.

triumphalism or cliché.¹²⁹ The unbearable will have to be borne and the uncontainable contained in the many. Witnesses will have to hear the Spirit's groaning that is too deep for words.¹³⁰ Survivor and witness will have to learn to imagine a different kind of future where the past's intrusions no longer define the way forward.

Rambo's is *not* too easy a hope. It is a participatory, death-enduring, death-marking, death-reconciling hope. It is a hope hard-fought and perhaps not won, but at least the *hope of hope* endures. I fear it is too simple, however. She urges, witness, hear the unspoken, be present to suffering. Yet the reality of the human condition is that we are not natural listeners, we are natural solvers. It takes significant self-awareness and self-restraint simply to sit with a person in pain and hear them, rather than try to assuage their—and our—discomfort. Our natural bent is to get over and through the emotional expression of others rather than sit with them in the trauma space, for doing so threatens our own worldview and well-being. Trauma healing requires a hearer who is able to make psychoemotional space for the reality of the sufferer's experience. Humans want harmony, but the reckoning of trauma is a grand crescendo of staggering, clanging dissonance. Things fall apart; the center, as such, cannot hold. Is there a middle full enough to hold when the center falls away?

There are problems with Rambo's text. First, she is imprecise in her definitions. The reader does not know what she means by life, death, or resurrection in the text. Without knowing these things, it is difficult to know how a theology of redemption

129. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 150-1.

130. Rom 8:26.

would—or even could—bear out.¹³¹ Second, by grounding her text in the experience of Holy Saturday, she necessarily sets death and life as poles in her work. Harden notes that not all trauma involves an encounter with death, even if something in us “dies” as a result of the experience.¹³² Criterion A for PTSD diagnosis in the DSM-5 reads,

The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence, in the following way(s):

- Direct exposure
- Witnessing the trauma
- Learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to a trauma
- Indirect exposure to aversive details of the trauma, usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders, medics).¹³³

From the APA’s definition, it is readily apparent that witnessing someone else attempting to perpetrate rape can be traumatizing, as is hearing that a loved one was involved in a car accident. While terrifying, and even traumatizing, these events cannot be equated with a near-death experience, unless of course one considers the death to be metaphorical in nature.

More importantly, setting life and death as poles means one is always necessarily moving away from one and toward the other. The person who has experienced trauma has, to some degree, lived “death.” One cannot un-have such an experience. Healing, then, not only recognizes the reality of the death-dealing experience, but also makes space for a new reality: aporia. I will write much more on this in chapter ten, but for now I hope it will suffice to write that aporia is the space of impasse, where one cannot un-

131. Mary Schaefer Fast, “Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. 34, no. 1 (2012): 140–141.

132. Glenn M. Harden, “Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining by Shelly Rambo,” *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 21, no. 2 (March 2014): 259–262.

133. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, 271.

know or un-live experiences. Aporia holds together the impossible and the possible and creates a third space, a *khora*, if you will. Aporia has the potential to encircle survivor and witness, to draw them together in mutual recognition of the needfulness of doubt and hope, death and life, fear and courage. In that space, becoming-in-community becomes possible once more.

In a sober review, Lynch notes that Rambo's theology of remaining, while poetic and sweeping, fails to account for two specific aspects of the neurobiological realities of trauma.¹³⁴ To counter this, I have offered some insights in chapter 4 into the neurological and biopsychosocial impacts of trauma alongside Rambo's categories. Next, trauma goes undifferentiated. Rambo treats traumas of all kinds, both individual and collective, as a monolith. No two persons experience trauma in precisely the same way, even persons affected by the very same event. As we will read later in chapter 5, the prophet Jeremiah's witness to his community takes place in the aftermath of trauma. The individuals who experience the loss of their homeland and return to see it in ruin respond variously to this truth. All of that is to say nothing about the compound effects of trauma across a lifetime (such as in complex PTSD, a condition with significant and ongoing research support, but no place in the current DSM), or pre-verbal traumas or those that occur as a child is acquiring language skills.¹³⁵

134. Melissa Lynch, "A Review of *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*," *Religious Education* 107, no. 5, (2012): 560-561, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2012.7>

135. While a more fulsome discussion of pre-verbal trauma is outside the scope of this project, see: Eric J. Green, David A. Crenshaw, and Amie C. Kolos, "Counseling Children with Preverbal Trauma." *International Journal of Play Therapy* 19, no. 2 (2010): 95-105; Ignez Carvalho Hartmann, "Forms of Expression of a Preverbal Reality in Child Psychotherapy," *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health* 33, no. 4 (2019): 259-281.

One appealing bit of Rambo's call to witness is that it may be done by anyone, but *should it* be done by all? I contend that there are many trauma stories that should not be heard by persons who lack adequate training. Some tales are too tender and the tellers too at risk of collapse if the witness lacks specific skill sets. Further, some hearers are at risk if they lack preparation for the perils of vicarious traumatization.¹³⁶ We will look at the characteristics of effective guides through trauma in our chapters on the place of the therapist in trauma healing and a pastoral response to trauma.

Rambo's middle space is insufficient, for it requires both too much and too little. It requires an ability to speak that which is defined as being unspeakable, which I contend is too much. It requires a hearer who is able to hear without glorifying or fetishizing the trauma event, which is also too much. A witness cannot be a mere warm body. Rather, a witness must stand in the gap between a person's tenuous grasp on life and the depths of hell, the smell of sulfur clinging to the flesh of both. Rambo's middle requires too little training, too little practical understanding of healing, too little hope.

Perhaps my biggest problem with this text, however, is that Rambo does not seem to believe that a trauma survivor can overcome trauma. Certainly, trauma leaves imprints. Is there no way to hold space for the reality of suffering along with a deep hope for becoming anew?¹³⁷ Rambo writes, "The middle story is not a story of rising out of the

136. I. Lisa McCann and Laurie Anne Pearlman define the phrase thusly, "Vicarious trauma refers to negative changes in the clinician's view of self, others, and the world resulting from repeated empathic engagement with patients' trauma-related thoughts, memories, and emotions." I. Lisa McCann & Laurie Anne Pearlman, "Vicarious Traumatization: A Framework for Understanding the Psychological Effects of Working with Victims," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 3 (1990): 131–149.

137. Rambo takes up the scars of trauma in her subsequent volume, *Resurrecting Wounds*.

depths, but a transformation of the depths themselves.”¹³⁸ Yet even the waves undulate, cresting and falling, their intensities varying. The middle place is where the terror of the grave is met with the terror of the unknown. But in the apophasic, we may find the unknown God and begin to move from the unspeakable toward the unsayable, which we will read in chapter nine.

Rambo’s criticism of Christianity’s creation-fall-redemption narrative that elides “the suffering that remains” is valid.¹³⁹ Yet I propose a middle such as the one she suggests must strain toward life alongside the realities of death, even as it resists a “redemptive glossing over of traumatic suffering.”¹⁴⁰ What holds when the center falls away? The many voices of trauma, and only the grittiest of hopes.

And what of growth? What of the opening out of the self into the world, into the community, and into God? What hope of recovery is found in this middle space, a place of witness in place of healing? What of a potential for new growth for the individual within the self and the world-at-large? In what ways may persons who have experienced trauma *become*? These questions lead me to propose a fourth category disrupted by trauma, one that serves as an umbrella for Rambo’s categories, an overarching vision of traumatic disruption as well as that toward which healing strains: becoming.

Becoming

Taken together, disruptions of time, body, and word prevent persons from *becoming*. Certainly, the world goes on and individuals continue to age chronologically.

138. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 172.

139. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 147.

140. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 148.

Yet the collapse of the known world leaves individuals with no grounding, no locus of safety in the self or in what remains. When all that anchors one in the world has fallen away, when time collapses in on itself, when the body is in a constant state of hyperarousal, when words fail, how can a person continue to develop, to *become*? I suggest that the loss of felt potential, the loss of a sense of a meaningful future, is the most insidious and devastating loss attributable to trauma. I suggest the aporetic space, what I will call the and/ands of trauma recovery, present doubt and hope, death and life, fear and courage as places of impassable, interpersonal dwelling. They recognize that, in aporia, these sets of characteristics are not polarized but are rather coextensive and needful. Aporia can be as dynamic as the interpersonal space enacted in the healing relationship, as dynamic as the Spirit herself.

The “Centre Cannot Hold”

It is important to know how trauma operates, but it is equally important to know how trauma *feels* to survivors. When I read Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming,” I read as a person who has lived through trauma and has experienced the disruptions it creates in time, body, word, and becoming. I read it with the embodied fear of one who has known the threat to life and limb trauma creates, and I feel its residue in my body. My stomach clenches and my heart rate and breathing quicken. I sense fear rising in my throat, making it feel tight and closed to speech, even breath. I read this poem in its fragmented phrases, its “gaps and fissures,”¹⁴¹ that which it says and unsays. In short, “The Second Coming” evokes and evinces the ongoing terror of post-traumatic living.

141. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 31.

The Second Coming—William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?¹⁴²

There is no question that this poem arouses terrifying, traumatizing images.

Newmark writes, “Traumatic poetry... suggests how the language we speak in order to understand the experience of trauma is also irretrievably marked by it.”¹⁴³ One can hear these disruptions of time, body, word, and becoming in Yeats. The widening gyre of human history, marked by sheer horror, is cyclical, coming ever round to destruction and non-being. Word has fallen away, for the falcon can no longer hear its master. Time has collapsed into dread of the Second Coming, or perhaps more accurately, dread of the

142. William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *Easter 1916 and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 60.

143. Kevin Newmark, “Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 254.

unknown. The body of the one to come has not yet been birthed even as the poet seems entirely disembodied in the recitation. And what of becoming? Things fall apart; the center, too, has fallen away. How does one root oneself in a world with no center, and thus no clear boundaries of any kind? This is exactly the work of trauma to shut down meaning-making, to hoist the anchor between the individual and her moorings. “Mere anarchy” takes the system over like a plague unleashed over the land, an originary order upended with no predictable rules or roles.

Yeats’ allusion to the figure of the Sphinx is terribly important to our understanding of posttraumatic spirituality. In Greek myth, the Sphinx was the mythical creature who destroyed all those who failed to answer its question(s) correctly. It was a hybrid creature, never quite human, never fully animalia, but rather anomalous. It was powerful, pitiless, and consumed each person who failed its test.

In one Gascon version of the myth, the Sphinx poses not one, but two, riddles to Oedipus. The first reads, “What goes on fours in the morning, on twos in the afternoon, and on threes at night?” The second is, “There are two sisters: One gives birth to the other, and the other, in turn, gives birth to the first.” Oedipus answers, respectively, “a person” and “day and night,” avoiding certain death. Upon being bested, the monster consumes itself.¹⁴⁴

What new beast, the poet wonders, will be born only to consume those who inhabit the land? The unspeakable horror is too much to countenance. This is much like the duality of post-traumatic spirituality. The one who bested certain death comes to

144. Julien d’Huy, “L’Aquitaine sur la route d’Oedipe? La Sphinge comme motif préhistorique,” *Bulletin de la SERPE*, 61(2012), 15-21.

reflect the ontic duality of the hybrid beast; this one is no longer cocooned in edenic innocence and has witnessed horrors but is removed from the immediate terror of the grave. The individual must choose whether and how to relate to self, God, and the world again. This choice is a bounded choice, for the individual has seen the worst of death and hell and yet cannot extinguish the impulse toward life resident in the human person. This person does not feel like death's victor, certainly not. Rather, in the closed-down world of the trauma survivor, the individual imagines the Sphinx awaiting her at every turn. How might one move from the living death of trauma into full life again? Paradoxically, by countenancing the horror from which one hides.

Perhaps we may respond to Yeats' vision of trauma with another vision, one in which we profess there is something beyond the nightmare of monstrous incarnation. The lie of trauma that there is nothing beyond the trauma, that solitary, unrelenting hell into which one has been cast by the fates. However, the basic premise of systems theory, indeed of panentheistic theology, is reflected in John Donne's famous line, "No man is an island, entire of itself."¹⁴⁵ Trauma's primary function is to isolate the survivor, to keep the traumatic event from recurring to ensure the continued survival of the organism. Trauma tells the survivor that the best of life has ended, so she ought to hold onto whatever scraps of security she can gather. A solitary life will not keep the trauma memories at bay, however. To move toward becoming once more, not only must the individual do the hard and holy work of remembering her trauma, but also begin cultivate safety inside herself that she may carry into other relationships.

145. John Donne, Meditation 17, retrieved from <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/409/>

What might that mean, practically speaking? Safety is an inside job. It is a locus within the self that develops in safe relationships, is carried into each new situation, and touches every ending. It means resisting the urge to close down when that familiar sphinxian fear pervades the body. It means being willing to see the ways life opens out, to feel once more the pull toward becoming fully alive all while feeling the fear that does not relent.

In her electrifying volume on Genesis 1, Catherine Keller writes, “All that becomes is *in* God, but not as apples are *in* a basket; perhaps more as they grow *in* a tree. Because all that becomes, becomes *within* God—as part of God—God is also becoming”¹⁴⁶ The glory of it all; the One who made the all the first things would not only let them become, but become along with them.¹⁴⁷ Yet trauma, by definition, causes deep fissures in relationships with the self, world, and God. In the *sturm und drang*, trauma over prunes the very tree in which our becoming, that essential participle of God, rests. What, then, remains of God when our mutual becoming is arrested? Perhaps, as is true of participles, we must allow for our image of God to shift from one of infinitude to non-finitude. I will write more on this in chapter ten. For now, perhaps it will suffice to say that to image the Holy as boundless and omnipotent, as happens in classical theology, is detrimental to those who have survived trauma. In its place, we may employ a more process-oriented understanding of God which envisages the Holy not as performing action, but rather sharing or participating in that which others cause to occur.¹⁴⁸

146. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 180, italics retained.

147. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 180-2.

148. David Crystal. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.), (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 351-352.

So far, we have explored the beginnings of this project and our starting point in Irenaean theology. We have examined various means of understanding the self and what happens to the self in trauma. Next, we turn to the biblical text and how applying a trauma and disaster lens helps us read the contents of Jeremiah and Lamentations as a means of trauma recovery.

Trauma and Community in the Biblical Text

As noted in the previous chapter, trauma causes fissures in relationships with God, the world, and the self. Trauma changes the way we think about the world we inhabit and the God we thought we knew. In the Hebrew Scriptures, one finds several models for making sense of trauma. In very general terms, in the Torah, suffering is understood as God's punishment, or acts of retributive justice.¹⁴⁹ In other places in the biblical text, suffering is understood as God's discipline, or soul-making; in still others, as testing; and in others beyond these, suffering is considered inexplicable.¹⁵⁰ We will take up soul-making and free-will theodicies in much more detail in the chapter that follows.

Lamentations and Jeremiah operate quite differently from those theodicies that follow. For example, we will see that Jeremiah rhetorically positions God as a rapist and Judah as God's wife. We may note our discomfort with the prophet's move and our desire for resolution while still staying in the trauma space with the community that has been ravaged. We may note our desire for resolution, even when it seems too long in coming. These are the realities of trauma survivors, which we may notice within ourselves in some small measure in our reading. Here we consider the books of Lamentations and Jeremiah as community responses to trauma. Why these two books?

149. For a thoroughgoing explication of retributive justice in the Hebrew Scriptures, see H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Room NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Brill, 1995).

150. For consideration of all major theodicies presented in the biblical text, see James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

First, they are both responses to traumatic devastation. Second, they approach the same event through different, though interdependent, means.¹⁵¹ By that, I mean they share “poetic terminology, genres, content, perspectives, poetic technique, and specific context” in their use of dialogical “singing” (that is, call and response).¹⁵² Finally, both books present means of understanding traumas that impact whole communities and their responses to God in the midst of those traumas.

By applying a trauma and disaster lens to these two biblical books, Kathleen O’Connor suggests Jeremiah and Lamentations offer means of moving through traumatic events *in* communities, *as* communities. This is accomplished somewhat differently in the two books given their differing purposes. Lamentations, as an example of community worship, represents prayer as truthfulness; impassioned hope; a work of justice; prayers for the world; and liturgical, daring prayer.¹⁵³ In so doing, it “refuses denial, practices truth-telling, and reverses amnesia. It invites readers into pain, chaos, and brutality, both human and divine.”¹⁵⁴ Jeremiah, one of the major prophets, is called to be a voice to his people, to call them back to YHWH, and to be a public face of the grief of a nation. Each

151. Historically, Lamentations was considered to have been written by the prophet Jeremiah. This seems unlikely, and modern scholars typically consider the book anonymous. Still, the historical linkage of the two books, along with their common themes, make them an appropriate pair for consideration here. For an introduction to Lamentations, see Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 484-505.

152. Nancy C. Lee, “Prophet and Singer in the Fray: The Book of Jeremiah,” in in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed. John Goldingay (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2007), 195. In this chapter, Lee contends the two voices are of the prophet and a “communal lament-singer,” likely female, who served as a voice of the people under siege.

153. Kathleen O’Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 125-136.

154. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 94.

countenances trauma and provides a means of restoration within community. Let us attend to the trauma and the means of healing in both books.

The Trauma

To understand the Babylonian period addressed by both *Lamentations* and *Jeremiah*, one must have some idea of the kind of devastation that occurred in Judah, especially in Jerusalem, during the historical period in question. Having just emerged from under Assyrian rule, under which Judah suffered greatly, a new superpower emerged: Babylon. Judah's king first aligned himself with Babylon, then rebelled several years later, prompting the first invasion of Judah in 597 BCE.¹⁵⁵ The second invasion came when Nebuchadnezzar's appointed puppet king of Judah, too, rebelled by withholding tribute. Babylon's army invaded, first attacking the countryside and outlying towns, and then laying siege to Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶ Though Jerusalem managed to hold off the army for two years, it fell in 587 BCE. Babylon deported the city's leadership, leaving the people without governance, sitting in the rubble of their city, and having no means of economic sustenance.¹⁵⁷ The third invasion came five years later as a result of a Judean insurgency, followed by more slaughter and deportations by Babylon.¹⁵⁸

The facts of the invasions, numbers of killed and deported Judahites, and the scope of the devastation are sharply contested due, in large part, to discrepancies in the extant accounts from the period. The facts, however, are less important for our purposes

155. Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 36.

156. Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 97.

157. Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 47.

158. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 13-17.

than the resulting accounts coming from it. While the evidence of the time period may be disputed, the aims of Jeremiah and Lamentations, respectively, are about testifying from the perspectives of the survivors.¹⁵⁹ O'Connor writes, “Testimony is speech from the inside of events; it does not seek to prove something but to portray and interpret the experience from the inside.”¹⁶⁰

Trauma Healing in Lamentations

In *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, O'Connor offers several lovely ideas of how healing can look in community. Namely, she contends we need a theology of witness, a way to cry out as a community and express the ways in which we feel God is absent. We do so, she claims, by seeing our pain, entering it as fully as possible, and recognizing the interconnectedness of humanity. To bear witness “requires that we be comforted, be witnessed, and ultimately become our own witnesses who treat with loving and gentle awareness the brokenness within” (p. 107).¹⁶¹ O'Connor contends the five poems of Lamentations represent impassioned hope; justice work; and liturgical, daring prayer.¹⁶²

The Poems

I offer a brief overview of the poems contained in the book as a grounding for the later interpretive work ahead of us. Slavitt grounds our study, noting the first four chapters contain acrostic poems, and the fifth, while not in acrostic style, “inasmuch as it

159. E.g., Jer 19:9, Lam 4:10.

160. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 16.

161. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 107.

162. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 127-136.

is twenty-two verses long, it echoes what has gone before and can even be taken as a mimetic representation of brokenness or of the silence of God.”¹⁶³ O’Connor writes, “Lamentations opens upon a universe of sorrow.”¹⁶⁴ Both speakers in the first chapter of the book recognize the depth of isolation “Daughter Zion” experiences, that she is without a comforter. The narrator in this chapter holds fast to a traditional view of disaster as Divine punishment for sin—this is not the case later in the book, however.¹⁶⁵ Daughter Zion begs God to see her pain while she gropes for words to express it (notice how this rhymes with the loss of word in trauma). Once she finds the words, however, she finds no audience with the Holy.¹⁶⁶

The second poem is drastically different from the first. In it, the narrator accuses God of the assault on Judah. God is veiled from the people, this nation who used to be God’s special people, the “honor of Israel” (Lam 2:1b). The impetus for the attack is said to be the Holy’s rage—God has “humiliated,” “destroyed,” “thrown down,” “broken down,” “cut down,” “burned,” “killed,” and “scorned,” to name but a few of the verbs in the chapter. All hope is gone from the people; old and young alike carry out mourning rituals. O’Connor notes that the narrator urges Daughter Zion to cry out to God, perhaps “trying to push the city woman out of the numbness that follows trauma.”¹⁶⁷

163. David R. Slavitt, *The Book of Lamentations: A Meditation and Translation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xiii.

164. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 17.

165. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 17-22.

166. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 29.

167. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 41.

The third poem is the only expressly hopeful section of the book, and even it fluctuates wildly between hope and despair. O'Connor notes this fluctuation is much like the re-emergence of hope after a tragedy, writing, "Often survivors reenter their suffering, briefly see beyond it, and then fall back into pain and loss, only to emerge again much later."¹⁶⁸ Notice, for example, the difference between verses 16-18 and 21-24:

He has broken my teeth with gravel;
he has trampled me in the dust.
I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
So I say, "My splendor is gone
and all that I had hoped from the LORD."

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

With only a few words of transition, the poet oscillates between abject despair and hope for a better tomorrow, trusting in the faithfulness of the God who has broken Jerusalem. In this third poem, the main character struggles with the ideas of "divine rejection and divine mercy."¹⁶⁹ Chapter 3 is characterized by "inexplicable hope," and that such hope is "one experience of survival, one interlude in coming to grips with tragedy, and one fragile interpretation among others."¹⁷⁰

168. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 45.

169. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 51.

170. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 57.

If chapter 3 seemingly, if haltingly, opens to hope, chapter 4 of Lamentations closes down once more. Individual survivors of the tragedy lend their voices to the poem, and no one addresses God. Despair seems once again to take root. O'Connor writes, "Life recedes and slips away with the ephemeral hope of the previous chapter."¹⁷¹ The people are starved; royals sit in ash heaps. Mothers—whose job it is to nurture and protect—devour (lit. "ate, consumed") their children.¹⁷² In this poem, the community remembers. They speak of their bitterness at survival, and finally they speak of the attack itself.¹⁷³ Yet this poem closes with hope for the punishment of another nation, Edom.¹⁷⁴ Rather than assume the Daughter Zion has learned nothing from its destruction, O'Connor suggests wishing for vengeance is a normal human response to oppression. She continues, "This poem brings the community's response into the open, creating psychic and spiritual space to begin imagining another reality, a different future."¹⁷⁵

The final chapter of Lamentations is written in the collective voice of the people (that is, in first person plural forms). Here, the community speaks. Still there is little hope to be found; there is no "happily ever after." O'Connor notes, "Everything that constitutes common life has come undone."¹⁷⁶ The voices urge God to remember them, to pay attention to their pain, and really to *see*. Importantly, O'Connor notes, "Since the

171. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 59.

172. Lam 4:10

173. Lam 4:17-20.

174. Lam 4:21-22.

175. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 69.

176. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 71.

community is one living entity, the sins of the previous generations bleed over in the present world.”¹⁷⁷ The people ask God to return to them and that, likewise, they would return to God. They plead for restoration *if God has not utterly rejected them.*

Brueggemann notes, that we should not, “miss the extreme reservation of the conclusion of the last poem,” which reads in his translation,

Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!
Renew our days as of old!
Or have you utterly rejected us?
Are you exceedingly angry with us?¹⁷⁸

To O’Connor, this ending “utters the unthinkable,” that God has abandoned the people forever.¹⁷⁹ O’Connor characterizes this ending as “wonderful” because it is truthful—it does not fabricate a premature hope. Rather, the book is permitted to be “a house for sorrow, neither denied nor overcome with sentimental wishes, theological escapism, or premature closure.”¹⁸⁰ In short, the book is honest about trauma and the longing for God’s voice in the midst of God’s echoing silence.

How, then, might Lamentations serve as a model for a community’s becoming? The missing voice of God requires something deeply vulnerable and courageous of the suffering community: They must countenance the idea that God is never to return. They must look squarely at their pain and the wreckage of their lives. And they must choose

177. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 75.

178. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 62.

179. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 79.

180. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 79.

the hard and holy task of rebuilding with no guiding star except the persons around them and the history they share.

The Middle

Lamentations, in both structure and content, rhymes well with Rambo's witnessing from the middle. The middle is the place between death and resurrection. Witness is not a fast track to healing. It tends, rather, to hold space for beginning a process of reuniting time, body, and word, into a shared experience of becoming once more. Witness *does* draw survivor and hearer into an intimate circle of deep courage and shared pain. The work, for Rambo, is to hear the unspeakable, encounter it courageously, and meet the terrifying middle space without triumphalism or cliché.¹⁸¹ The unspeakable will have to be heard. Others will have to hear the spirit's groaning that was too deep for words. All will have to learn to imagine a different kind of future, where the past's intrusions no longer define the way forward. For Rambo, this is the Spirit's work. Because Lamentations is written from a vector of brokenness, it is a "theological watershed, an in-between place where the old theology of a punishing God no longer holds but new understandings have not yet emerged. The people have come to an impasse, yet they long unceasingly for God's presence."¹⁸² In its "narrative wreckage," the book recognizes the life readers had expected to lead was over and a new story has yet to take its place. God never responds in Lamentations; nevertheless, the book stands

181. Triumphalism and cliché operate in similar ways. If the idea that we will "win" in the end is assumed, then this idea helps to assuage some of the discomfort of the present. Similarly, engaging cliché, particularly Lifton's thought-terminating cliché, quells cognitive dissonance. This allows the brain to maintain a status quo using established neural pathways instead of creating new ones on what I call "the rugged path to change."

182. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 139.

as a “comforting witness,” a community response to pain.¹⁸³ In the end, “The haunting voices of Lamentations... insist upon wide-open alertness to the world’s small sorrows and massive atrocities. They demand that we become witnesses....”¹⁸⁴ For Brueggemann, the prophetic poet is one such witness, who also “asserts hope precisely in exile.”¹⁸⁵

Inexplicable Hope

Bearing witness to trauma and disaster is what allows hope to take root once more. In a beautiful and challenging picture of “inexplicable hope,” O’Connor suggests,

...biblical hope does not emerge from proper reasoning or new information. It is not optimism or wishful thinking. It is not a simple act of the will, a decision under human control, or a willful determination. It emerges without clear cause like grace, without explanation, in the midst of despair and at the point of least hope. It comes from elsewhere, unbidden, illusive, uncontrollable, and surprising, given in the pit, the place of no hope.¹⁸⁶

That is not to say the hope found Lamentations is an easy one. Slavitt finds hope in the very structure of the poetry of the book, writing,

...what we have here is not merely embellishment [viz., using the acrostic style] but a serious assertion that the language itself is speaking, that the speech is inspired, and that there is, beyond all the disaster and pain the book recounts, an intricacy and an orderly coherence the poetry affirms in a gesture that is encouraging and marvelous. The texture of the poetry is what lets us know that, somehow, the catastrophe is not total.¹⁸⁷

Rather, the book is so powerful precisely because it refuses the power of denial, that which would allow one to insulate oneself from one’s own pain and the pain of others.

183. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 7; xiv.

184. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 138.

185. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 69.

186. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 57.

187. Slavitt, *Lamentations* xiii.

Taken together, Lamentations represents prayer as truthfulness, impassioned hope, a work of justice, and prayers for the world. In its daring, the book is helpful for “reclaiming our humanity, breaking through our denial, and teaching us compassion.”¹⁸⁸ Jeremiah, as we will soon see, functions differently.

Healing in Jeremiah

While Lamentations is structured in poems, Jeremiah is a mix of literary styles, including poetic oracles, prose stories, and sermons.¹⁸⁹ The book opens with the prophet’s three key tasks: “to utter the prophetic word that tears down kingdoms and builds up kingdoms, to declare the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem by foreign conquerors for its idolatry, [and] to sustain the prophet as a wall of brass despite all opposition.”¹⁹⁰ For Brueggemann, the prophet’s task is told “in the language of grief.” He goes on to write, “...that grief and mourning, that crying in pathos, is the ultimate form of criticism” of a people who would not admit the sure end of life as they knew it.¹⁹¹ This grief was two-dimensional, grieving for the end of his people and grieving because no one would listen to him and choose to see what was so plain to Jeremiah. How like the experience of trauma survivors is the grief of the prophet. In fact, Brueggemann calls Jeremiah’s a “ministry of articulated grief.”¹⁹² The prophet’s grief is an antidote to the

188. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 126-136; xiv.

189. Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 26.

190. Lawrence Boadt, “Do Jeremiah and Ezekiel Share a Common View of the Exile?” in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed. John Goldingay (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2007), 20.

191. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

192. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 48.

numbness around him. It helps us see two important things: first, “that weeping must be real because endings are real;” and “the weeping permits newness.”¹⁹³

The weeping that permits newness rhymes with O’Connor’s focus on the ways in which the prophetic book serves as “a moral act, a healing therapy, a redeeming lifeline to survival.”¹⁹⁴ Interacting with God—even a God who is angry and punishing—kept the Holy from disappearing from the community altogether. Thus, stark honesty about their lived experiences anchored the people to a belief in the Living God. It was a relentless seeking, a relentless hope, that kept the community looking to God for meaning in the wake of cataclysm. While the whole of Lamentations is comprised of poems, Jeremiah’s forms are many and varied. They include prophetic utterance, poems, biographical stories, confessions, and sermons. Offered here are brief discussions of each form contributing to the book’s structure.

Prophetic Utterance

Early in Jeremiah, the prophet likens Judah to a broken family in the form of a drama. In act one, God is the central character, with male Israel and female Judah completing the cast. It begins with a reminiscence about the “good old days,” moves into Israel’s failures, then to Judah’s shortcomings, culminating in a “divorce.”¹⁹⁵ Immediately after, though, God invites the wife and children to return, and all are reunited.¹⁹⁶ O’Connor notes the metaphor works because, “it finds words for the disaster,

193. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 57. I am reminded of Ecc 7:3 in the Message version, “Crying is better than laughing. It blotsches the face but it scours the heart.”

194. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 136.

195. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 36-42.

196. Jer 3:21-4:4.

simplifies its causes, creates a miniature version of a monstrous reality, and thins it down to approachable segments of pain.” Above all else, it insists “... God is active in the universe and has been active throughout the disaster and is so even now in the destruction.”¹⁹⁷

War and Weeping Poems

The war poems in Jeremiah 4-6 alternate between the aforementioned family drama and the mythic war that “uncreates the world,” a kind of reverse creation event. The two wars take place alternately, one cosmic and the other domestic. The war poems culminate in God’s rape of Judah. This language is appalling and horrifying, as it was intended to be. God is the rapist, destroying his wife Judah. O’Connor writes, “God’s rape of Jerusalem expresses the horrors Judah experienced as a society.... Rape is what happened to them.... Jeremiah’s rape poem restores capacity to speak what cannot be spoken.”¹⁹⁸ Notice how this restoration of speech rhymes with one of the primary tasks of trauma recovery. The prophet here helps re-story the event such that the people can speak to its destruction. O’Connor contends this vision of a violent God is precisely what allows the people to survive, in that it keeps God powerful, active, and present. Further, it concretizes the community’s suffering in terms all would have understood.¹⁹⁹

197. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 42.

198. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 51; 55.

199. In the ANE’s religious milieu, the “real” God was the victorious God. Given that Israel had been routed by Babylon, in the religious imagination of the people, Marduk and his pantheon were the superior deities. O’Connor writes, “Defeat means that Judah’s God is ineffectual and disappeared.” Thus, Jeremiah’s rape metaphor at least keeps YHWH a “culturally potent conception that begins the work of interpretation, of uttering the unutterable, of making sense of the senseless.” O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 54-56.

The weeping poems that follow are a means of becoming human again after an unimaginable tragedy. Though the people are numb, God is not, and neither is the prophet. Jeremiah “has only the hope that the *ache* of God could penetrate the *numbness* of history.”²⁰⁰ The Holy weeps for the destruction of the earth and calls, time and again, for the women to come perform the mourning rituals.²⁰¹ YHWH insists they come and weep at the devastation they find; death is all around and meaning has fallen away. The women serve as witnesses who validate the suffering of Zion, who hold space for deep grieving and remembering the traumas the nation has suffered.²⁰²

Biographical Stories

In several chapters of the Jeremiah (1; 16; 20; 26; 32; 37-38; 40-43) the reader learns about the prophet’s life. Jeremiah is not a hero. Rather, he is a kind of anti-hero, a participant in the suffering of Judah who bore witness to its destruction from the inside while also being privy to God’s speech about the nation’s fate. It is a story of the surprise of survival, of trial and life in the pit, of eventual escape.²⁰³ Above all, it is a testament to one man not having been overcome by the death in its ever-presence. O’Connor writes, “Jeremiah’s biography.... presents him as a man familiar with sorrow—their sorrows—whose life embodies ... deprivation of family, social isolation, captivity, abandonment, assault, threats of death, imprisonment in the land, and finally deportation. Each painful event ... symbolize[s] sufferings of Judah.”²⁰⁴

200. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 55.

201. Jer 9:17-22.

202. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 65-68.

203. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 72-79.

The Confessions

Like the biographical sketches, the confessions are scattered throughout the book of Jeremiah (11-12; 15; 17; 18; 20). These sections most closely match the poems of Lamentations, except that they are voiced by the prophet about his vocation. Yet they mirror the suffering of the nation and, in that way, belong to the community as one voice in a communal chorus of pain. The briefest spots of hope are extinguished by despondency; anger and distrust follow recognition of the Holy's absence.²⁰⁵

The confessions serve another, important purpose as well. In them, Jeremiah accuses God of causing his pain and trouble. While a thread running through the book is one of human responsibility for calamity, the laments "challenge the book's theodicy and its twin, the rhetoric of human responsibility."²⁰⁶ O'Connor makes it clear that all speech about God is a product of its culture and is, by nature, "provisional, partial, and incomplete."²⁰⁷ The highest of Jeremiah's accusations against the Holy is found in 20:7, "O YHWH you have seduced me and I was seduced. You have raped me and you have prevailed."²⁰⁸ Heschel writes, "The striking feature of the verse is two verbs *patah* and *hazak*.... The first denotes seduction or enticement; the second, rape. The words used by Jeremiah to describe the impact of God upon his life are identical with the terms for

204. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 79.

205. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 84-85.

206. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 85.

207. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 85.

208. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 87.

seduction and rape in the legal terminology of the Bible.”²⁰⁹ Jeremiah is a prophet with whom the people could identify as one who suffers with them, yet he is also in the unique position of receiving divine comfort as God’s prophet (12:5-6; 15:20-21). Crenshaw writes, “Jeremiah is torn between an intense desire to give YHWH the benefit of the doubt and the force of brutal reality, events that are challenging his worldview.”²¹⁰

For O’Connor, the power of the confessions lies in their instructive nature: They teach the nation how to pray even after disaster. The prophet seems to cry,

Here is what to do in the pit of hopelessness: cling to God, even when God has slipped away. Yell at the top of your collective lungs. Hold tightly, mercilessly, and with every ounce of strength, shout and scream at the deity. Tell the truth, voice rage and despair right in the face of the “Just Judge.” Hold nothing back Let it out so you can see it yourselves and see each other in this deep, unending wound. God is hidden there in that space.²¹¹

The Sermons

Jeremiah’s sermons claim the Temple fell because of immoral behaviors that, in turn, “make a sham of worship.”²¹² These include worshipping the Queen of Heaven (7:18-19); making sacrifices for which God did not ask and refusing to listen to the prophets (7:21-28); defiling the temple, idol worship, and child sacrifice (7-30-8:3). The prophet preaches that God tried to warn the nation about their sin, but they refused to hear. Jeremiah’s sermons serve to “call the people back to their most basic identity as a worshipping people.”²¹³ Moreover, they function as a way to begin to restore meaning in

209. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 144.

210. James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

211. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 90.

212. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 95.

the lives of the people.²¹⁴ Boadt notes, “The only conclusion left at the end is that all hope must lie with the exiles in Babylon, who are relatively safe and quiescent during this disaster.”²¹⁵

Healing in Jeremiah

Taken together, the structure and content of Jeremiah offer several means of healing. The book’s “grab-bag of literary forms,” “literary shapelessness,” thematic changes, and lack of organization mirror the confusion experienced by survivors of the destruction it addresses and, by extension, the rest of us.²¹⁶ Keeping God alive to the people is perhaps the first step toward reconciling time, body, word, and becoming. In O’Connor’s view, an angry rapist of a God can be seen as ultimately healing because it “keeps God alive in the midst of disaster....”²¹⁷ The book offers language—honest, raw language—about the devastation the people experienced through the prophet’s confession of having been violated—literally seduced and raped—by the Holy. By extension, the prophet’s candid agony offers readers permission to begin to make meaning as a means of continued survival.

Jeremiah speaks also to the experience of time after trauma, both the way a linear experience of life is interrupted by trauma and how trauma circles back to impact the present long after the devastation of the disaster.²¹⁸ The book’s structure reminds readers

213. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 102.

214. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 102.

215. Boadt, “Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” 21.

216. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 125.

217. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 137.

that “Traumatic memory is wordless and static.”²¹⁹ Judith Herman observes there are two stages of trauma recovery. The first begins when “... survivors begin to look at what happened to them and find language to name the disaster A second stage of recovery ... involves the work of witness, one who receives the grief hidden in the haphazard narratives recalled by the victim.”²²⁰ Jeremiah, in its many and varied forms, offers both language and witness to the people of Judah. The book as a whole functions to honor the experience of Judah, refusing to “heal the wound of my people carelessly” or “cry ‘peace, peace’ where there is no peace.”²²¹ In a bid to keep God alive and reckon with the trauma, time is interrupted in Jeremiah. The past is simultaneously ever-present and ready to overwhelm the community *and* moving toward a future controlled by God.²²²

Another means of recovering words are found in Jeremiah’s sermons. O’Connor calls Jeremiah’s sermons “a work of healing ministry,” for they offer the people a measure of control and “stabilize the universe.”²²³ In narrowing the cause of the people’s plight to their faithlessness, the sermons offer the people agency and therefore serve to “build resilience and encourage recovery.”²²⁴ Further, they offer readers permission to begin to make meaning as a means of survival, even if they do so in a manner we consider problematic (i.e., blaming human failings as a means of explaining actions

218. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 132-133.

219. Herman, *Explorations in Trauma*, 175.

220. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 68.

221. Jer 8:11

222. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 131-134.

223. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 98.

224. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 102.

attributed to the Deity). They offer consolation to the people in the way they express God's care; namely, in the way God tried to ward off the disaster. In short, the sermons defend God's character and integrate the disaster with the "pre-disaster narrative" of God's relationship with Israel.²²⁵

The confessions are perhaps the clearest example of the disruption of bodies in the book of Jeremiah. Through the prophet's experience of suffering, trial, and captivity, still he clings to his vocation as God's prophet. In this way, he is very much an "emblematic sufferer" and an "ideal survivor."²²⁶ In this unique position of the prophet who doubts God yet clings to the Holy One of Israel, Jeremiah's confessions provide a view into how relationship with God may be revived after disaster. Jeremiah openly questions divine justice and, in so doing, God accepts the blame for the destruction of Judah. However, "... in the process, Jeremiah keeps talking and praying and imploring. He keeps God alive."²²⁷

The Communion of Becoming

One marker of trauma in Lamentations and Jeremiah is the felt absence of the Holy One. The book of Jeremiah offers a precious gift in the way it "stammers toward the unsayable," offering language and logic to incomprehensible devastation.²²⁸ Where words have failed, the prophet opens the conversation about God within the community of believers. Lamentations functions in much the same way, offering language to the

225. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 98.

226. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 87, 90.

227. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 91.

228. O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, 137.

community around the magnitude of its loss. Both serve, too, to mark the passage of time, to recall the past events and recognize them as a past that invades the present, a past that is worth remembering and grieving. Brueggemann notes “Tears are a way of solidarity in pain when no other form of solidarity remains.”²²⁹ The body of the prophet experiences and remembers trauma. He goes on, “Further, the prophet’s body, in its survival, becomes emblematic of the survival of the nation.”²³⁰ But what’s more, the framing of the nation in human terms in both books (e.g., Daughter Zion, Husband Israel, Wife Judah) helps make cosmically-scaled events more accessible to a people whose bodies experience “terror all around.”²³¹ Calling terror what it is helps normalize the experiences of those whose bodies have also been traumatized. The community has undergone such a horrifying ordeal that, within that Ancient Near Eastern milieu, the option for God’s survival in the community’s imagination requires God to be the cause of Israel’s pain.

Trauma and disaster create active unbecoming, dis-integration. Lamentations and Jeremiah offer several means of reconciling time, body, and word toward healing. Yet becoming, by its very nature, is consubstantial. We cannot become in a vacuum. We cannot become except in relationship. This rhymes beautifully with Catherine Keller’s ontotheology of relation, wherein God and humanity *become* together because we are inextricably and fundamentally related, wherein the most basic truth that “...I and the other alter each other.”²³²

229. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 56.

230. O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, 79.

231. Jer 20:4

232. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 20.

Perhaps the mystery of relationship is this: we are, with God and creation, able to whisper a broken “amen” to truth. This is our holy “Let it be so.” “Let it be so” that we are made in the image of a God moved by humanity. “Let it be so” that we look squarely at the wreckage of our lives. “Let it be so” that we tangle with what we have had to do to survive. “Let it be so” that we lean into the vulnerability of feeling again. “Let it be so.”

Trauma touches us all; the extent to which it does so is a merely a matter of degree, not kind. We live in a world rife with conflict, pain, and sorrow. In fact, the Christian faith is founded on a trauma. If trauma is the open wound common to humanity, if we all experience the disruption of time, body, word, and becoming, then we may call the sharing of such stories in community our most vulnerable communion. Yet the means by which Jeremiah reconciles himself to God and community is not how trauma is often accepted in the church today. Far from the prophet’s accusation of God to reconcile the community to the Holy, the study of theodicy accuses the traumatized to defend God’s honor. Let us turn to the study of theodicy and its problems for trauma healing.

The Problems of Theodicy

Theodicy is the study of defending the goodness of God even in the face of overwhelming evil. As I noted earlier, this project is not a theodicy in that its primary aim is not to defend God, but to help trauma survivors. The term theodicy was coined by Gottfried Leibniz in his 1710 work *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (*Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*).²³³ Theodicy has been studied by theologians from of old; there are multiple attempts in the biblical text to understand suffering and pain (e.g., the Joban poet, Qoheleth, the prophet Jeremiah, the last of whom we will engaged in the previous chapter).²³⁴ Those who travail with trauma will come upon questions as to the meaning of suffering, particularly in religious contexts. For that reason, here I will sketch and discuss an Irenaean (via Hick) soul-making theodicy and an Augustinian free-will theodicy as popular examples of the field before engaging a brief discussion on some problems of theodicy as a whole.

Irenaeus (By Way of Hick)

In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus lays what the groundwork for what has come to be known as the “soul-making” theodicy, popularized by John Hick.²³⁵ It is important to note Irenaeus did not expressly set down a theodicy. In fact, neither Irenaeus nor the

233. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*, trans. Eveleen M. Huggard (London, England: Routledge & Paul, 1951). For the historical development of theodicy, see Leroy E. Loemker, “Theodicy,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 4:378–84.

234. For a robust discussion on multiple theodicies, as well as how individual thinkers have contributed to their understanding, see Michael L. Peterson (ed.), *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

235. It is important to note that John Hick wrote *Evil and the God of Love* during his evangelical period. Later, Hick largely left evangelical views behind and embraced religious pluralism. Because of this, in *Death and Eternal Life* (1994), Hick took up themes such as reincarnation and post-mortem moral development.

Eastern tradition that followed him developed anything nearly so robust as the dominant Western Christian Augustinian free-will (or soul-deciding) theodicy which follows. Hick writes, “[the Eastern tradition] has nevertheless provided the foundation for a radical Christian alternative to the Augustinian theodicy.”²³⁶

Contra Augustine’s free-will theodicy in the next section, Irenaeus posits that imperfectly-made humans inhabit an imperfectly-made world that is, still and although, the best of all possible worlds.²³⁷ For humans to be able to exercise human free will, the world must be open to pain and suffering, for these things allow for moral development. God, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, made a world, and humans, in process, were imbued with the image of God but not yet the likeness (see chapter 2 for more on this).

This theodicy is framed around the knowledge of good and evil. If humanity knows no evil, it cannot know good; God is therefore implicated—ontologically and morally—in the existence of evil for allowing for the possibility of such (viz., having created humans imperfectly) for the purpose of soul development. John Hick writes, “A world without problems, difficulties, perils and hardships would be morally static, for moral and spiritual growth comes through responses to challenges; and in a paradise there would be no challenges.”²³⁸

Hick, citing Irenaeus, posits that humans could not have been created in a perfect state because we would not have been able to receive that perfection. Irenaeus writes,

236. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York, NY: Palgrave McMillan, 2010), 210.

237. In the 18th century, Leibniz will posit God created the best of all possible worlds. This move, known as Leibnizian optimism, proceeds as such: If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, and if God created this world, then it follows that this world is the best of all possible worlds. In God’s omniscience and omnicreativity, God was able to survey to all possible worlds prior to the logical moment of creation and selected this world, the best of the possible worlds. Note that for Leibniz, the creation of this specific world was a logical requirement of the characteristics of God. A being such as he posited God is could not have done otherwise and remained what he said God is. As such, the creation was a moral choice but not a free moral choice.

238. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 374.

“God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it.”²³⁹ Sin entered the world not in the form of a revolt, but rather due to Adam and Eve’s childlike vulnerability. That is, sin came into the world during humanity’s “childhood.” The task of maturation is individual in nature, so while the individual may mature through travail, “the progressive fulfillment of God’s purpose does not entail any corresponding progressive improvement in the moral state of the world.”²⁴⁰

Hick writes, “And yet throughout the biblical history of evil … God’s purpose of good was moving visibly or invisibly towards its far-distant fulfillment.”²⁴¹ God allows for evil in the world so that humanity may choose good, especially the ultimate good that is God. The move toward maturity is a consistent testing of what is good and what is evil, embracing what is good and shunning what is evil. God has allowed, and humanity retains, “a hazardous adventure in individual freedom.”²⁴² The end of human life is a gradual move through these hazards toward spiritual maturity.

Hick borrows from John Keats in calling life the “vale of soul-making.”²⁴³ In the eschaton, all persons will be fully morally developed. By “all persons,” Hick means universalism—the notion that all souls will be united with the Holy in the end. If God’s

239. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:38:2.

240. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 256.

241. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 243.

242. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 256.

243. The phrase “the vale of Soul-making” was written by John Keats in a letter to his siblings in April 1819. He writes, “The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is ‘a vale of tears’ from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven - What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you Please ‘The vale of Soul-making.’” (The Letters of John Keats, ed. by M. B. Forman. London: Oxford University Press, 4th ed., 1952, pp. 334-5.)

purpose is maturation, he reasoned, the existence of hell would preclude further development and render any previous development inconsequential. A Deity whose ultimate aim was to transform humans into the likeness of Godself would not, therefore, relegate persons to a space without benefit or purpose.

Hick's Irenaean theodicy has both strengths and weaknesses. In terms of strengths, it is compatible with the tenets of evolution. It does not require originary perfection but allows for growth in both humans and the Holy. It holds space for the love of God to be evident in the creation and for human choice to pursue that love. Furthermore, Hick's Irenaean theodicy gives human life an aim and trajectory toward God and one another. It offers a purpose for suffering that allows it to be "useful" in this life. Finally, it is universalist in nature, maintaining that hell is merely a useful construct to help shape meaning in life rather than a literal place wherein some persons will suffer eternal torment.

That said, it has significant weaknesses, too. First and foremost, one must question whether the end justifies the means. Is the kind of suffering trauma survivors endure worth the end of moral growth? Hick acknowledges that not all suffering produces the desired end of that growth. If that is true, does God cease to be omnibenevolent?

Further, the Irenaean theodicy fails to account for natural evil, which can also inflict significant trauma. While it is true that interpersonal traumas tend to result in greater trauma symptoms, natural disasters can also produce trauma responses. At best, the Irenaean theodicy offers a partial response to evil because moral evil is only one kind of evil in the world.

Moreover, it fails to answer the question of why some suffer and others do not. If God's end is to grow the soul toward the likeness of Christ, are those who do not suffer less loved by the Holy? Positioning suffering as that which God offers for the growth of

the human soul is problematic in and of itself, but if God denies some persons that opportunity for growth, then God is most certainly not wholly good.

Finally, suffering is not quantifiable in relation to its soul-making properties. Could a soul have been “made” after only one heinous event, and not the many that may accrue in a lifetime? To use one grotesque example, could fewer persons have died in the Shoah and survivors still had their souls formed toward moral perfection? Where is the fulcrum on suffering, and when does it tip over into “enough” suffering for the formation of souls? Relegating the answer to the mystery of God is insufficient in light of the unimaginable suffering so many persons all over the world experience. Irenaean theodicy has both strengths and weaknesses, but the strengths, to my mind, do not sufficiently account for the weaknesses to make it a tenable solution to the problem of evil. Now we turn to the best-known of theodicies in Christendom, Augustine’s free-will theodicy.²⁴⁴

Augustine

For Augustine, everything that exists has being. Either it is “Being itself” (i.e., God) or exists through participation in that being. Because God created all that is, everything that is, is good, though created things have varying degrees of unity. A rock, for example, is good because it has internal unity in its rock-ness. A human mind is good because it is the unity of many “faculties and powers” and is therefore a higher good than a rock. The ultimate good is God who is, “...so much of a unity that even the conceptual distinction of parts is impossible. Being is good qua unity, but the more unity a being has, the better it is.”²⁴⁵ A being’s goodness has only to do with that being’s internal unity. Thus, Augustine here contrasts metaphysical goodness with practical goodness. A virus is good because of its inner constitution or coherence, though practically speaking it may

244. For a thorough review of free-will theodicies, see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 5–73.

245. Johannes Brachtendorf, “The Goodness of Creation and the Reality of Evil: Suffering as a Problem in Augustine’s Theodicy,” *Augustinian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2000): 83.

need to be avoided or extinguished. The goodness of the being has nothing to do with the interpersonal effects of its being. Even a snake's bite is "good" to "the morally superior man," who "takes a superior standpoint from which the goodness of all things is patent."²⁴⁶ Because God, as Being itself, is wholly good, any idea that God is responsible for evil is self-contradictory on its face.

Because of God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence, evil should not exist. And, in fact, in Augustine's theodicy, evil *cannot* exist.²⁴⁷ Therefore, he reframes evil as a privation of good. Evil has no substance, no being, but rather exists *in* a being. Evil is a corruption of the will. Both moral and natural evil occur as a result of this corruption, which can be traced back to Adam and Eve's "original" sin. Though the first humans did not contain evil, they were corruptible because they were endowed with free will, which is necessary for living well.

Because Adam and Eve's sin corrupted our nature (given that sin was "passed on physically from generation to generation through procreation"²⁴⁸), salvation from such sin could come only through receiving grace through Jesus the Christ. The soul who did not receive that grace would end up in a literal hell, the physical punishment for which was secondary to the separation from God.

Evil is "merely a quality of relations between substances, or ... a mere deception—a perspectival deception."²⁴⁹ In *The City of God*, Augustine argues that human reactions are the problem, wrongly evaluating other beings with respect to their utility and the perceiver's will and desires (*ad nostram*) rather than the being's intrinsic

246. Brachtendorf, "The Goodness of Creation," 86-7.

247. David Ray Griffin, "Augustine and the Denial of Genuine Evil," in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2017).

248. Ted Peters, "The Evolution of Evil" in *The Evolution of Evil*, eds. Gaymon Bennett, Martinez J. Hewlitt, Ted Peters, & Robert John Russell (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 46.

249. Brachtendorf, "The Goodness of Creation," 88.

goodness (*per se ipsas*).²⁵⁰ For example, it would be wrong to call a virus bad when it is fulfilling its purpose. A virus, created by God, would be good. The harm the virus causes other living organisms does not negate its basic goodness. The interpersonal or intraspecies effects of the virus is an effect of sin on the natural world.

An Augustinian theodicy, too, has strengths and weaknesses. In terms of strengths, Augustine's theodicy, at least on its face, maintains the omnibenevolent goodness of God. It allows the Holy to exist in a sphere untouched by sin and absolves God of responsibility for the state of the world. It also maintains a distinct difference between God and humanity. That God exists in all persons is a basic panentheistic claim, and therefore is unproblematic for those of us of that persuasion. Yet panentheism does not claim humans and God are co-equal like the persons of the trinity—there is a qualitative difference, in that God's basic motivation and posture toward the world is that of love.

The greatest strength of Augustinian theodicy is how it works together as a system. When the three major parts—evil as the privation of the good, a free-will defense of the Holy, and the doctrine of original sin—are taken together, a relatively tight constructive proposal emerges. That said, when broken down into constituent parts, the system, too, breaks down.

Leaving aside scientific problems with Augustine's theodicy, such as basing his reasoning heavily on the Genesis account of creation, weaknesses abound in Augustinian theodicy. Writing against the Manichean dualism, his former sect, Augustine's starting point for theodicy is an idea of metaphysical goodness. If this goodness had obtained, however, evil would have to have created itself *ex nihilo*. This is because “free and

250. Brachtendorf, “The Goodness of Creation,” 88-9; Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, Books XI, XII, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/civ12.shtml>

finitely perfect creatures, happy in the knowledge of Himself, and subject to no strains or temptations” spontaneously turning to sin amounts to “sheer self-contradiction.²⁵¹”

Moreover, making human sin, as passed on through procreation, responsible for natural evil places a rather more significant burden on humans than “merely” moral evil. In the Augustinian scheme, the human race is culpable, meaning even newborns come into the world with the taint of sin.²⁵² It is morally reprehensible to hold a person responsible for what they have not done, which would certainly make it harder to justify the notion of God’s goodness and justice.

Finally, hell would have to have been part of the design of the world, meaning God knew sin would invade. Genesis 3:7 says it was only after Adam and Eve ate of the fruit that their eyes were opened. Therefore, any choices they made before that time would not have been moral choices, and certainly not ones resulting in the punishment of the human race entire. God, as creator, knowingly creating beings with limited free will should be at least partially responsible for evil. Again, to my mind, the strengths of Augustine’s free-will theodicy do not outweigh its weaknesses. No matter how lovely the theological system he created may be, the real impact of it still affects suffering persons in ways they cannot remedy, for it is just the way things are. God is protected, but people are left to suffer. This is true of theodicy as a discipline, to which we turn now.

251. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 249-250.

252. “Then, in the weakness of the infant’s limbs, and not in its will, lies its innocence. I myself have seen and known an infant to be jealous though it could not speak. It became pale, and cast bitter looks on its foster-brother. Who is ignorant of this? Yet we look leniently on these things, not because they are not faults, nor because the faults are small, but because they will vanish as age increases. For although you may allow these things now, you could not bear them with equanimity if found in an older person.” Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Book I.

Theodicy as a Discipline

All theories of theodicy have their weaknesses, two examples of which are above. For trauma survivors, however, even the concept of theodicy is problematic. Theodicy is the practice of defending the goodness of God even in the face of overwhelming evil. As noted above, the term was coined by Gottfried Leibniz, whose work was meant to vindicate the Holy in light of the evil in the world. But does God need our defense? If so, does God warrant such a defense? Even if we answer affirmatively both of those questions, there are yet further difficulties to countenance.

Theodicy may offer partial solutions that are moderately intellectually satisfying from the perspective of apologetics, but it fails to solve the very real problems humans face.²⁵³ That is, an argument may be theoretically possible, but still pastorally unsatisfying. Theodicy can be seen as an answer, or at least a partial answer, to certain questions. The philosophical, or apologetic, question calls into question the compatibility of belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent deity with the reality of evil, pain, and suffering. The theological question includes an exploration of theological reasons for evil in light of claims about the Holy. The pastoral question seeks to find comfort in the face of torment, pain, and loss. While we might affirm that theodicy, to a certain extent, provides an answer to the first two of these questions, it undeniably fails to answer the third. Not only the theodicies examined above, but all theodicies and even the *project* of theodicy inherently and necessarily fails to satisfy the existential needs of those stricken by trauma.

253. Many theologians reject a traditional theodicean approach. Emmanuel Levinas, Johann Metz, Walter Lowe, David Griffin, James William McClendon, Jr., and D. Z. Phillips are a few such thinkers.

Ironically, the One who, according to Christian theology, needs no protector and implores her chicks to nestle beneath her wing; the One whose mighty outstretched arm gives comfort to all who are afraid; and the One whose heart is with the downtrodden, the destitute, and the most vulnerable even if such alignment brings pain and sorrow; becomes the object of protective theological activity, at the expense of those most exposed to the ravages of life. When the goal of theology becomes an intellectual exercise rather than seeking to solve the very real suffering of people in the world, it becomes harmful, not only in its particulars but also as a general program. Christian theology ought to pattern itself after the God it purports to study and understand, with a preferential option for those experiencing harm, physically and emotionally.

I am reminded of Richard Kearney's words, "The God that died in Auschwitz was the God of theodicy."²⁵⁴ I think also of Rabbi Irving Greenburg's "working principle," "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children."²⁵⁵ Sadly, and I hope unintentionally, those who engage in theodicy fail to account for this "working principle" and, in so doing mimic the practice of the aggressor.

When we conceive of God as one who feels the pain of the world, God, too, is traumatized when people are harmed. I am reminded of the passage in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, wherein two men and a child are condemned to the gallows. The men die almost instantly, but the child, due to his slightness, lingers for more than half an hour between

254. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 61.

255. Irving Greenburg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust" in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and after the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford, England Oxford University Press, 2007), 5

life and death. The narrator relays the following conversation: “Behind me, I heard the same man asking: ‘For God’s sake, where is God?’ And from within me, I heard a voice answer: ‘Where He is [sic]? This is where – hanging here from this gallows’...”²⁵⁶

Trauma is inscribed on God’s body via the bodies of those who experience trauma.

As noted above, trauma disrupts time, body, word, and becoming. Theodicy cannot exist without words. However, the words theodicy employs damage trauma survivors in the way they privilege God’s honor over attending to the suffering of those affected by the worst of life’s tragedies. Declaring such a vision of Holy omnibenevolence when the lived experience of God’s goodness is lacking keeps trauma survivors in the trauma space, reliving their experiences in silence while damaging words flow over them. Theodicy, then, compounds the problem by seeking the intellectual assent of the survivor to its premise: that maintaining God’s image is more important than the survivor’s lived experience.

Moreover, theodicy privileges protecting God over caring for God’s beloved. Theodicy seeks to answer the unanswerable. Positing a theodicy as a response to human suffering is defending an idea of God and an understanding of the world that fail to obtain. I imagine theodicy standing between a traumatized person and the Holy One, finger wagging, declaring that this God is indeed good and not to blame for the evil that has occurred. In reality, this protection of God comes at the expense of the sufferer. Theodicy is, or at least can be, terrifying in its protection of God, the survivor’s silent question ever-present: If God is good, then what am I? Using dogma to convince a person

256. Mauriac François, foreword to *Night* by Elie Wiesel, trans. Marion Wiesel (1960; repr., New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2006), xx.

that God is good, even in light of her experiences, is futile at best and re-traumatizing at worst. A better posture toward the traumatized individual is to sit with her, gazing together toward the One who offers healing. When the work of God is experienced by a suffering individual, words are restored *to* her, not foisted *upon* her.

For God to be absolved of all the evil and trauma persons have faced, survivors would have to, in essence, “forgive and forget” around the trauma. Of course, this forgetting is neurobiologically impossible, for though by definition the brain does not process trauma events fully, their effects linger in the minds and bodies of survivors. One hears the resonance between this truth and the problems of theodicy: theodicy requires the impossible. Martin Heidegger will critique the Western metaphysical tradition in similar ways, noting that ontotheology conflates Being-as-such with Highest Being, requiring the very forgetfulness of Being Heidegger decries (more on that in the next chapter). In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger writes that this conflation of Being seeks to control and manipulate the divine. Of Heidegger’s argument against this conflation, Schunke writes, “God is not allowed to be God, but instead is fit into our preconceived frameworks and forced to play the role of the moral God, the first cause, or *whatever construct is needed to guarantee a philosophical position will hold.*”²⁵⁷ But as we have seen, in trauma, the center cannot always hold. When things fall apart, if the construct of God as blameless is retained, the “ceremony of innocence”²⁵⁸ is drowned, leaving only the worst of one’s thoughts and beliefs about the self and the world in its wake.

257. Matthew Schunke. "Apophatic Abuse: Misreading Heidegger's Critique of Ontotheology," *Philosophy Today* 53 (2009): 164-72, italics supplied.

258. Yeats, “The Second Coming,” 60.

One potent example of the problem of theodicy as it relates to trauma survivors is what Katie Cross terms “body theodicy,” which she explains as follows: “Theodicy has the potential to shift from being an idea or set of arguments (an external experience of being told that your suffering is your responsibility) to a piece of theology that becomes trapped within the body (hence “*body theodicy*”); an internal process of blame and condemnation of the self.”²⁵⁹ The expectations laid upon female-presenting persons²⁶⁰ Cross calls “theodicies of blame.”²⁶¹ This would include both the blame and responsibility purity culture places on those socialized as women in its contexts. Some examples of this blame include purity metaphors of being “crushed petals” or “chewed gum” if they are sexually active before marriage (even when that sexual contact is coerced or forced), the impact of modesty culture on perceived womanhood, and the responsibility to keep others from “stumbling.” Cross writes,

In the context of purity culture, theodicy reveals itself in both Augustinian and Irenaeian forms. Women are expected to conform to standards of purity and, where they do not, they are chastised and branded ‘sinful.’ Further... their suffering is pedagogical. If they experience, for example, an abusive relationship or a break-up, this is configured as something that is their fault. Any suffering that they go through is something to be learned from.²⁶²

259. Katie Cross, “‘I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin’: The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of ‘Body Theodicy’” in eds. Karen O’Donnell & Katie Cross (eds.) *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture, and Church in Critical Perspective* (London, England: SCM Press, 2020), 27.

260. It is important to note that purity culture harms all persons, regardless of gender. That said, the weight of purity culture falls disproportionately on persons who are assigned female at birth, as Cross notes in her essay. I have largely used the terms female presenting and perceived womanhood here, though it should be understood that I am including persons who were assigned female at birth and socialized to take on feminine roles in society. These persons may now present as any gender or no gender.

261. Katie Cross, “I Have the Power,” 23.

262. Cross, “I Have the Power,” 26.

The result of these ideas—which of course become enforced norms—is often the trauma of being held responsible for one’s choices *and* the choices of others who are perceived to be male. In extreme purity culture, women are to blame for being raped and assaulted because they are “tempting” simply because they exist in assigned female bodies. When this ideology becomes “embedded” in a person’s experience through repeated exposure and a consistent message from plural voices, it can be carried in the body, as Cross notes. This is, of course, precisely what happens in trauma. Theodicy, in this context, layers blame onto traumatized individuals via theology, thereby causing more trauma. Purity culture’s theology is “lazy theology,” Cross writes, in its choice to point the finger of blame at those who are already marginalized instead of challenging the theology and concomitant ideology within extant structures.

Cross argues that the damage of purity culture to those assigned female at birth is spiritual, psychological, and physical; thus, it is a theological construct that has real, lived consequences and “concrete repercussions.”²⁶³ This is one example of how theodicy is more harmful than helpful, and how theodicy itself can be traumatizing. When an idea moves from defending the Holy to deepening trauma, we must question why “proving” God’s goodness and maintaining the theological status quo is more important than helping God’s beloved heal.

If we allow it to do so, however, the failure of theodicy can both unmask the failure of the god of classical theism and open space for a living and breathing, moved and moving, Deity. There is a marked difference between trying to reconcile evil with the

263. Cross, “I Have the Power,” 32.

existence of benevolent God and understanding “posttraumatic spirituality,”²⁶⁴ specifically, in this case, what it means to be “fully alive” to self, God, and the world after experiencing trauma. This project is not, then, a theodicy. It is, rather, a bridge from the couch to the church, bringing the best of traumatology to bear on theology in what David Tracy calls a “mutually critical correlation.”²⁶⁵ It combines centuries of theological thought and cutting-edge trauma therapy. It is, in short, an aim toward faithful living, bringing healing to bear on the world in which, and the people with whom, we live.

264. R.Ruard Ganzevoort, “All things work together for good’? Theodicy and Posttraumatic Spirituality,” in Gräb, W. & Charbonnier, L. (eds.) *Secularization Theories, Religious Identity, and Practical Theology* (Münster, Germany: 2009), 183-192.

265. David Tracy, “Foundations of Practical Theology” in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don Browning, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1983), 76.

Being-Toward-Becoming

In the previous two chapters, we considered biblical and theological responses to trauma. Using Shelly Rambo's framework for trauma as disruption of time, body, and word as the spine of my theological argument, I have offered a fourth category disrupted in trauma: becoming. But what does it mean to become? The constructs of being, selfhood, and becoming are mutually-correlative but not coextensive. To understand becoming, we must begin with being. For the purposes of this project, I have chosen two thinkers who, as contemporaries, approached being very differently, one as a philosopher and one as a theologian.

I have chosen Heidegger and Tillich for several reasons. First, they both lived and wrote through the greatest corporate trauma of modern history: the Shoah. Second, Heidegger's work strongly impacted Tillich's; Tillich's *The Courage to Be* is a reply to Heidegger's *Being and Time*.²⁶⁶ Third, who better to ask questions about existence than existentialists? Finally, both lived as the modernism gave way to postmodernism, their works acting as a fulcrum between the two. This is not unlike post-traumatic living, with survivors having one foot in the old life and one foot in the new realities one experiences in the aftermath of trauma. We will begin with Heidegger.

266. Bolea writes that *The Courage to Be* was a reply to *Being and Time*. Stefan Bolea, "The Courage to be Anxious. Paul Tillich's Existential Interpretation of Anxiety," *Journal of Education, Culture and Society* 6, no. 1 (2015;2020): 20-25. O'Meara calls Heidegger's relation to Tillich "a *structural* one... It enters into the very structure of theology as Tillich conceives and develops it; it offers the structural foundation for the first example of that theology in action: Tillich's theology of Ultimate Concern (his phenomenological and hence introductory term for God) and Being-Itself." Thomas F. O'Meara, "Tillich and Heidegger: A Structural Relationship," *The Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 2 (1968): 253.

Heidegger on Being

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger sets out both to define being and distinguish being from beings (i.e., existents). He claims modern philosophy has overlooked this most basic of metaphysical questions. Not only have we forgotten to ask the question of what it means to be, he writes, we have also forgotten that we have forgotten.²⁶⁷ Heidegger's project, then, is meant to help the field of philosophy remember being as separate from existence. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is meant to help the field reattune to the world of being. Far from the empty concept traditional ontology has taken being to be, Heidegger claims, "Everything we talk about, mean, and are related to is existent [seined] in one way of another. ... Being [Sein] is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the objective presence of things [Vorhandenheit], subsistence, validity, existence [Dasein], and in the 'there is' ['es gibt']."²⁶⁸

The text is organized into two divisions containing six chapters each. Part One deals with interpreting Dasein (to be defined later in the book) in terms of time and explicating time as "the transcendental horizon of the question to being."²⁶⁹ Part Two deals with Dasein and temporality, that is, its postures toward time. It is important to note that this book is but a partial exploration of both being and time; while Heidegger offered further thoughts on both topics, he never completed this work and believed it to be incompletable in the end.²⁷⁰ However, the interpretative task of what being consists in is a critical question for our own time, and therefore is a valuable undertaking even so.

267. Dennis J. Schmidt, foreword to *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger, trans. J. Stanbaugh (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2010), xvii.

268. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 5-6.

269. Schmidt, *Being and Time*, vii.

270. Schmidt, *Being and Time*, xvi-xvii.

Another real challenge of this text is the way in which Heidegger uses language. To be sure, translation is at best a tricky business. This text's translator notes three especial difficulties in translation: Heidegger uses many German neologisms, he uses common vocabulary in uncommon ways, and he uses philosophical words in untraditional senses.²⁷¹ Because of this, the text has been interpreted in a great many ways depending on which version one reads and the individual's purpose in the reading. I find it important, then, to mark my social location in the reading. I am a feminist scholar and process theologian writing on trauma recovery in a constructive sense. Reading Heidegger because it is an incredibly important work, I nonetheless struggle with Heidegger's association with Hitler's regime and the Nazi party. I recognize how problematic he was as a person and, simultaneously, know that it is nearly impossible to articulate an understanding of being without including Heidegger's work.

Central to Heidegger's interpretation of Being is Dasein, an ordinary German word meaning "existence" or "presence." In Heideggerian thought, Dasein is unique to human beings. His move is to break the words into their component parts, Da meaning "there" and Sein meaning "being." Taken together, Dasein means "there being." More specifically, Dasein is "Being-in-the-world." It is also In-Sein, that is, oriented toward "Being-In as such."²⁷²

Being-in-the-world cannot be broken down into component parts and must be taken as a whole, but that whole consists in three things. First, "In-the-world," which discusses the

271. Schmidt, *Being and Time*, xxiii.

272. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 53.

ontological structure of world. Second, Being is the “who” we are looking for in our phenomenology. Being [Seiende] is always situated in Being-in-the-world.²⁷³ Third, Being in, as such, must itself be analyzed, for it is a necessary but insufficient means of understanding Being.

Dasein also refers to the relation of two beings in space.²⁷⁴ For Heidegger, humans are situated in a particular time and space and cannot understand themselves outside of that situatedness. That is, Heidegger rejected the Cartesian notion of a mind/body duality and instead conceived of selfhood as both material and embodied. As Apostolidou puts it, “Existence appears rather to be the product of a constantly changing relationship between the ontological given of being-in-the-world and the ontic interpretations given.”²⁷⁵ Dasein *dwells* in the world much as humans dwell in their homes. Yet Being is an utterly ordinary thing, for the most part. Humans do not often notice Being until they have a problem with Being. Heidegger’s most famous example of this non-noticing has to do with a carpenter and a hammer. The carpenter uses the hammer to go about her work without thinking about it. While she does not consciously feel separate from her tools, neither is she thinking about them as objects distinct from her. Indeed, the only time she thinks about the hammer in a theoretical way as an object apart from herself is when the hammer is broken. So it is with Dasein. Dasein is worldly, communal, and projective in Heideggerian thought.

Anxiety is what makes Dasein, most often unseen, visible. Heidegger writes,

273. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54.

274. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54.

275. Zoe Apostolidou, “Heidegger’s Being-in-the-World and Its Relation to Tao Te Ching,” *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*. 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 52.

The formal existential totality of the ontological structural whole of Dasein must then be formulated in the following structure: the being of Dasein means being-ahead-of-one-self-already-in (the world) as being-together-with (innerwordly being encountered). This being fills in the significance of the term *care*, which is used in a purely ontological and existential way. Any ontically intended tendency of being, such as worry or carefreeness, is ruled out.²⁷⁶

Certainly, this critical insight speaks for itself. It is important to note, however, for those who have not read this text, that both care and the anticipation of death are critical facets of authentic Dasein.

Finally, Heidegger situates all of Being in time. As noted above, time is an ontological precondition of Dasein as care. He links being and time as having an internal relationship based on Dasein's other relationship to nothing (or nothingness). This relationship to nothing involves two states: Being-toward-death and Being-guilty. In the first instance, Heidegger means one cannot properly understand one's existential choices unless one contemplates constantly one's own nullity. Human beings are utterly contingent beings who exist in an utterly contingent life, situated in a particular time and place which will end in a specific way at a specific time.

Time is the vehicle that moves Dasein's feature of care from potentiality to actuality. Care must be, ontologically speaking, oriented toward the future self where that Dasein will be. Temporality is what gives care meaning. All aspects of temporality are important to Heidegger. "Ahead-of-itself" is Being's openness to the future; "already-Being-in" is its openness to the past, and "Being-alongside" is Being's openness to the present, though Heidegger privileges "Ahead-of-itself."²⁷⁷

276. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 186.

277. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 180.

As noted earlier, Heidegger's project never finds its completion, for the thinker rendered it incompletable. Thus, the ending he presents stands to reason, at once both unsatisfying and breathtaking. Heidegger writes,

The existential and ontological constitution of the totality of Dasein is grounded in temporality. Accordingly, a primordial mode of temporalizing of ecstatic temporality itself must make the ecstatic project of being in general possible. How is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be interpreted? Is there a way of leading from primordial *time* to the meaning of *being*? Does *time* itself reveal itself as the horizon of *being*?²⁷⁸

For Heidegger, there is always more to be said, more transcendence of Being than may be grasped, more authenticity to be sought, more questioning to be done. In this ending, Heidegger models the behavior he believes humans should undertake, namely continual seeking, whether or not one finds the object of such seeking.

Tillich on Being

In *The Courage to Be* (1952; 2000), Paul Tillich defines the titular phrase as, “the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.”²⁷⁹ His central premise is, “The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.”²⁸⁰ For Tillich, nonbeing “is not a concept like others. It is the negation of every concept,”²⁸¹ and yet is part of being. He writes, “Being ‘embraces’ itself *and* nonbeing.”²⁸² Anxiety is the way in which a being is aware of nonbeing and is divided

278. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 415.

279. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 2nd. ed. (1952, repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 3.

280. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 90.

281. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 34.

into three categories. These are ontological (i.e., fate and death), spiritual (i.e., emptiness and loss of meaning), and moral (i.e., guilt and condemnation).²⁸³

Tillich writes that ontological anxiety is inescapable because all persons are “aware of the complete loss of self which biological extinction implies.”²⁸⁴ Fate is the “mini-death” continually reminding individuals that life is unpredictable and fragile. All persons are subject to accidents, sickness, and weakness. By taking that anxiety into oneself, by facing the potential of meaninglessness, one asserts oneself “against the void.”²⁸⁵

The second anxiety, spiritual, is encountered in the form of meaninglessness. While death is the ultimate threat to ontological being, meaninglessness is the same threat to one’s spiritual well-being. Tillich writes, “The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings.”²⁸⁶ Tillich is careful to note that doubt itself is not a problem, and is, in fact, beneficial, but “total doubt” is what produces emptiness and meaninglessness.²⁸⁷ This anxiety arises from the extinction of a “spiritual center,” which arose after “society [was] driven to collective psychosis by the Second World War.”²⁸⁸ On one side of this anxiety is that loss; the other is religious fanaticism, another outworking of that doubt.

282. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 34, italics supplied.

283. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 40-42.

284. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 42.

285. Booker T. Washington, *Metaphysics of Love* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 74.

286. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 47.

287. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 48.

288. Bolea, “The Courage to Be Anxious,” 23.

Spiritual anxiety is a threat to the total being, for the “most revealing expression of this fact is the desire to throw away one’s ontic existence rather than stand the despair of emptiness and meaninglessness.”²⁸⁹ Tillich writes that nonbeing is a threat from both ontic and spiritual sides; they are inextricably linked.

The final doubt is “moral self-affirmation,” and it flows from the first two doubts.²⁹⁰ For Tillich, human beings are essentially, “finite freedom,” which is to say beings “free within the contingencies of … finitude.”²⁹¹ Humans experience ambiguity between good and evil, and therefore experience guilt, which then produces self-rejection. This self-rejection Tillich frames as the conscious choice of nonbeing.

Courage does not remove or displace this anxiety, but rather acknowledges and affirms the self in the face of these anxieties. This “neurotic anxiety” “is the way of avoiding nonbeing by avoiding being.”²⁹² Courage is defined as “the readiness to take upon oneself negatives, anticipated by fear, for the sake of a fuller positivity.”²⁹³ Courage must be a balance between temerity and cowardice (see Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, discussed briefly in chap. 10) without losing the self. It is important to note that anxiety is powerful because it affirms what stirs beneath it: being. Anxiety itself has no aim, but

289. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 51.

290. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 51.

291. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 52.

292. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 68.

293. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 78.

anxiety can be transformed.²⁹⁴ Tillich notes, “anxiety strives to become fear, because fear can be met by courage.”²⁹⁵ When fear is met by courage, being is affirmed.

It is important to note that Tillich does not see the call to courage as an individual one. Rather, it is “participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation,” a place where ontology meets ontotheology²⁹⁶ Self, world, and God meet and mutually influence one another. In fact, he argues the more the self is related, the more that individual may participate in being, for courage “is not the courage to be as oneself, but the courage to be as a part.”²⁹⁷ (Significantly, in his *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, Tillich notes, “Psychotherapy cannot remove ontological anxiety, because it cannot change the structure of finitude. But it can remove compulsory forms of anxiety and can reduce the frequency and intensity of fears. It can put anxiety ‘in its proper place.’”²⁹⁸)

Chapters four and five focus extensively on interrelation and individualism in historical cultures and cultural movements. While interesting, they are not particularly important to the content of this project except to situate Tillich’s own viewpoint, which is existentialism. In existentialism, Tillich finds point of view, protest, and self-expression.²⁹⁹

294. Bolea, “The Courage to Be Anxious,” 20.

295. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 39.

296. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 22.

297. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 89.

298. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology I-III* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959-1964), I, 191.

299. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 126-131.

The final chapter of *The Courage to Be* deals with the Tillichian notion of the courage to accept acceptance. For him, religion is the locus of being, and therefore the place where power of being, and even the courage to be, is most accessible. Mysticism is the place in which the courage to be is most successfully accessed in the individual, where “the individual self strives for a participation in the ground of being which approaches identification.”³⁰⁰ Grounded in Buddhist mystic traditions, Tillich writes, “That from which the point of view of the finite world appears as self-negation is from the point of view of ultimate being the most perfect self-affirmation, the most radical form of courage.”³⁰¹

Thus, for Tillich, mystical connection to the ground of being is that which allows the individual to overcome the anxiety of fate and death because that which is finite is, in the end, revealed to be nonbeing. Likewise, meaninglessness is overcome when “the ultimate meaning is not something definite but the abyss of every definite meaning.”³⁰² In addition to transcending from the finite to the infinite, persons find courage in encountering God, whom Tillich calls “the source of courage.”³⁰³

Ultimately, one must receive love from beyond one’s self, for this is how individuals overcome the anxieties of guilt and fate. Both the mystical encounter and self-love require faith. Tillich defines faith as “the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself” and goes on to write, “The courage to be is an expression of faith and what

300. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 157.

301. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 158.

302. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 158-159.

303. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 160.

‘faith’ means must be understood through the courage to be.”³⁰⁴ Faith, then, is experiencing the power of self-affirmation of one’s own courage, generated from connection to being-itself (i.e., God).

Tillich ends the book with a subheading reading, “The God above God and the courage to be.”³⁰⁵ In this section, Tillich makes clear that the God of classical theism has failed, and only transcending that definition of the Holy may doubt and meaninglessness be subsumed by the courage to be. Tillich writes,

The God above God is the object of all mystical longing, but mysticism also must be transcended in order to reach him. Mysticism.... plunges directly into the ground of being and meaning, and leaves the concrete, the world of finite values and meanings, behind. The God above the God of theism is not the devaluation of the meanings which doubt has thrown into the abyss of meaninglessness; he is their potential restitution.³⁰⁶

He contends the church may grasp the God above the God of theism and yet maintain its symbols and thus “mediate a courage which takes doubt and meaninglessness into itself.”³⁰⁷ Tillich closes the book with this iconic line, “*The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.*”³⁰⁸

A Trauma Recovery-Centered Ontology

Heidegger and Tillich provide differing ontologies. Heidegger, on the one hand, offers scholars a broad interpretive lens. Not only is his work open to myriad interpretations, but also his posture toward the world is that of asking questions.

304. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 172.

305. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 186.

306. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 186.

307. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 188

308. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 190, italics retained.

Therefore, the work lends itself well to intersectional study. Again, for Heidegger, Being is best expressed as *Dasein*, an ordinary German word meaning “presence” or “existence.” Broken down into its component parts, the word literally means, “there being.” *Dasein*, therefore, is “Being-in-the-world” and “Being-In-as-such.”³⁰⁹ Being-in-the-world consists in the world’s ontological structure, a “who” for whom we are looking, and an analytical element.³¹⁰

With respect to Rambo’s trauma categories, Heidegger is perhaps more open to interpretation than Tillich. One aspect of Heidegger’s view of time is highly problematic, however. Heidegger insists it is necessary for humans constantly to contemplate their deaths in everyday decision-making. While this may be true and helpful for persons who have not experienced the devastation of trauma, those who have already know intimately what Tillich calls “the mini-death of fate.” This kind of constant contemplation might be better termed rumination, and produces hypervigilance, a clinical criterion for diagnosing PTSD.³¹¹ Thus, for those healing from trauma, the opposite may be true: the individual needs to learn to focus not on the invisible, unknown end to come, but rather on the life that is now.

As it regards body, Heidegger is emphatic in setting forth a mind-body unity so contrary to Cartesian thinking. Time, body, and word are false categories in reality, but helpful as a means of explaining trauma’s impacts. Heidegger does something similar

309. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 53.

310. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54.

311. See Michelle L. Moulds, Madelyn A. Bisby, Jennifer Wild, Richard A. Bryant, “Rumination in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review,” *Clinical Psychology Review*, 82 (2020).

here in the sense that he demarcates kinds of Being, or even modes of Being, but no part of Being is truly separate from the whole. Therefore, the reader is able to interpret body in both intrapersonal and interpersonal senses, much like one may do with Tillich.

Finally, in the category of word, Heidegger offers a light treatment of *Logos* in *Being and Time*, but a critical one. He defines *Logos* not as reason or judgment, but rather as *discourse*.³¹² For process theologians, *Logos* as discourse offers rich interpretive possibilities, as humanity and the Holy One interact and are both changed by the interaction. Though trauma can rob persons of words, there remains a discourse, a conversation, a welcomed questioning between parties. Even when words fail, even when the Word fails, still the space exists for conversation. In Christian theology, perhaps this is the space enacted by the Spirit (more on this in the next chapter).

How might one incorporate Heideggerian thought into one's ontology, specifically with an eye toward becoming? Again, all aspects of temporality are important to Heidegger. He writes of "already-Being-in" as openness to the past, "Being-alongside" as openness to the present, and "Ahead-of-itself" as Being's openness to the future. Significantly, Heidegger privileges Being toward the future. Yet while time runs linearly in popular understanding, trauma suspends individuals in the temporal space(s) of the worst moment(s) of their lives. The present is spent trying to avoid the past so the being may exist into the future. But that kind of life keeps persons from becoming. I wonder, then, if there is space within Heidegger's ontology for a future orientation that respects time as more than simply the "horizon of *being*."³¹³ Is it possible that time

312. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 30-32.

313. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 415.

encompasses horizon, vertex, and everything in between? That is, is it possible that Being and time are held in God, “but not as apples are *in* a basket; perhaps more as they grow *in* a tree”?³¹⁴

Tillich, on the other hand, focuses on “the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.”³¹⁵ This is due to at least one of three kinds of anxiety: ontological, spiritual, and moral. While moral anxiety is important to consider, it is better suited to cases of moral injury than the focus on this project, which is trauma proper, and thus will not receive a more fulsome treatment here.³¹⁶ Tillich’s assertion that death and fate are inescapable rhymes well with trauma work in the sense that individuals who have experienced trauma are fully aware that death and fate are inescapable; they live with the fear of death lurking around every corner and behind every door. This fear of death affects time in the sense that trauma survivors live with a sense of foreshortened future. It affects body in the sense that the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include “physical reactivity.”³¹⁷ It affects word in the sense that this nearness to death causes the prefrontal cortex to disengage and survival parts of the brain to take over. Rambo notes, “...trauma has its own language—the language of the unsayable.”³¹⁸ Taken together,

314. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 180.

315. Tillich *The Courage to Be*, 3.

316. For an introduction to moral injury as a construct and its healing, see Rita Nakashima Brock & Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury After War* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012).

317. APA, *DSM-5*, 271.

318. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

Tillich's ontological anxiety clearly disrupts becoming in each category Rambo offers and, therefore, disrupts becoming.

Spiritual anxiety, too, rhymes well with trauma's effects. In Tillichian terms, spiritual anxiety is defined as "anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings."³¹⁹ He goes on to note that "total doubt" produces emptiness and meaninglessness, the loss of a spiritual center.³²⁰ For individuals whose lives have been disrupted by trauma, experiencing a sense of meaninglessness is common. The individual seeks meaning elsewhere, and yet, "Everything is tried and nothing satisfies. The contents of the tradition, however excellent, however praised, however loved once, lose their power to give content *today*."³²¹ Recovering meaningful ritual is a community project, which I will explain more in chapter ten as it relates to communion. Spiritual anxiety, however, robs the individual of the becoming-in-community aspect of ritual, which causes ritual to lose its power.

Earlier, I suggested that loss of meaning is the most significant of all the losses endured by trauma survivors. Tillich states this strongly in his assertion that people die by suicide when their spiritual anxiety overwhelms their ability to go on in the world. This is a powerful statement and should not be overlooked, though it is not the focus of the present work. It serves, however, to elucidate the grave nature of meaninglessness—it can be deadly. Meaninglessness lifts up one of trauma's most interesting effects on time: the one who has experienced trauma not only seeks to forget the traumatic past, but also

319. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 47.

320. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 47-48.

321. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 48.

does not believe there is any meaningful future to be had. She is, therefore, suspended in the temporal space of the trauma. Rambo writes, "...the past event...enters into the present in a way that confuses a trajectory of past, present, and future."³²²

Meaninglessness often affects body in the sense of depression, and that not only in the sense of depressed mood, but also of that which happens in the neurology of trauma survivors. Rambo considers traumatology "the study of what remains."³²³ What remains in the aftermath of trauma is often a quagmire of neurochemicals flooding an activated limbic system. Peter Levine writes of the fight-or-flight response, "This last-ditch immobilization system is meant to function acutely and only for brief periods. When chronically activated, humans become trapped in the gray limbo of nonexistence, where one is neither really living nor actually dying."³²⁴ This explanation sounds very much like meaninglessness.

Finally, meaninglessness and word go hand-in-glove in the aftermath of trauma. One continues to exist in a space where "the world is gone" and what remains often does not seem sufficient to warrant survival.³²⁵ The unnamed horror of the unspeakable trauma is its constancy, the fear that it will never end. When such a thing happens, what is there left to say?

Tillich's ontotheology is a critical aspect of his ontology, noting that the human person is both an individual and a part. Being a part does not mean only part of the world

322. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 20.

323. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 15.

324. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 105.

325. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21.

and community, but also part of Being itself, which is to say, God (or, for Tillich, the God above the God of Theism). Mystical connection to the ground of being is the vehicle for overcoming all three kinds of anxiety for Tillich, tapping into “the source of courage.”³²⁶ This mystical overcoming is called faith, the space in which fear is met by courage and being is affirmed. As such, “There is a sense in which Tillich’s is a theology of tension. For Tillich, the religious or spiritual aspect of human life is not one arena alongside others, but is the dimension of depth within them all.”³²⁷

The move to becoming, then, may be best represented as a move toward undoing, or unbecoming that which one has become as a response to trauma. This is not to say the goal is to have persons return to a pre-trauma view of the Holy (or, for that matter, the self). Rather, it is a move toward the aporetic nature of being, where the effects of trauma are acknowledged as real and impactful, yet also where the person recovers a fuller life. However, since time cannot run backwards, even unbecoming is a kind of becoming. That is, if humanity’s being is indeed grounded in the ground of being (i.e., God), then ontology has some substance, some quality or gravitas, that is originary, as we are part of the whole and of the Holy existing in time. Process theology asserts that the Holy One is “vulnerable to the world.”³²⁸ There is both peril and potential in this idea. The peril is that God and humanity, by fact of this mutual vulnerability, may become locked in what seems to be an unchanging state. (Ironically, this is not only what classical theism posits,

326. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 160.

327. Adam Wert, “Tension and Ambiguity: Paul Tillich and Kendrick Lamar on Courage and Faith,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 33, no. 1 (2017): 113–121.

328. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 131.

but also couches as perfection).³²⁹ The potential is that humanity and God may become together.

Bolea notes that “the most significant divergence between the two philosophers is their treatment of the distinction between fear and anxiety. Heidegger conceived anxiety as a ‘fallen’ anxiety, as a missed opportunity to be authentic... Tillich’s opinion is entirely different: ‘We try to transform the anxiety into fear and to meet courageously the objects in which the threat is embodied. We succeed partly, but somehow, we are aware of the fact that it is not these objects with which we struggle that produce the anxiety but the human situation as such’ (Tillich, 1952, p. 45).”³³⁰ In both Heidegger and Tillich, there is a notion of the movement of time in the idea of being. Being is not a static, changeless thing, yet one problem of orthodox Christianity is the way it has tried to shape God into a Platonic ideal rather than a dynamic, feeling, moving Being. The *Logos* as circumscribed onto the God of Jesus of Nazareth has made of the Holy a graven image, an impressive statue with feet of clay. To recover and reaffirm life after trauma, a fresh wind must blow.

329. Catherine Keller writes, “‘God as unchangeable Absolute’ functions as ‘Sanctioner of the Status Quo’—even if that status quo is unjust and unsustainable.” Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), xiii.

330. Bolea, “The Courage to Be Anxious,” 24.

The Word and the Breath

If for Irenaeus the Word is God who spoke the world into being and reflects back upon Godself, Catherine Keller points the reader helpfully back to the idea that the *theo* has often been divorced from the *logoi* in Christian theology.³³¹ The beginning of the Judeo-Christian canon opens with God's invitation to creation to become, but God's speaking the creation into becoming presupposes God's own being. Yet if Keller is correct in her assertion, can we hear the *theo*'s *logoi* in our understanding of *Logos*?

The Word

The concept of *Logos* has a richer and deeper history and meaning than its usual Christian usage of "word." While etymologically such a translation is not incorrect, to assume that *Logos* aligns with the contemporary English semantic domain of the term "word" would do a grave disservice to its significant philosophical connotation. *Logos* has a history in Western philosophy that stretches back to the Pre-Socratics. Though *Logos* likely had an important role in philosophical reflection prior to the sixth century BCE, Heraclitus is credited with its first written and retained usage. *Logos* played a central role in almost all of Heraclitean philosophy, impacting his metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. It was most influential in his metaphysics, making that realm of philosophy an appropriate starting point.

Before advancing too far, however, it is important to note that Heraclitus has experienced a renaissance of sorts, making it increasingly difficult to differentiate

331. Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 172-182.

between what Heraclitus himself likely thought and what more recent philosophers have adapted or borrowed from him. The task is challenging in a historical sense, given the fragmentary nature of what is left of his writing. That said, Heraclitus' most enduring concept is metaphysical: that all is fire. *Arche*, the primordial element, is the fire from which all things come and to which all things return. It is the fundamental essence of all that exists. Understanding this concept in a less-than-literal sense, Heraclitus is claiming that all is flux, transient, and ever-changing; “you never step into the same river twice,” as the aphorism goes. Such a position, however, can prove problematic in and of itself. Fire, or flux, must be partnered with another concept in order to solve some of the classical philosophical questions of the Pre-Socratic age.

One of the enduring questions relates to the one and the many.³³² What is it that lies behind the world of sensory experience? While one experiences a great deal of diversity in everyday life, there is nonetheless a unity to be found in the world. Heraclitean flux does well to address the diversity, “the many,” if you will. Conceptually it provides a framework for unity, but in practice that fire requires an ordering principle, something that will shape and direct it, something that will pull together the flux to create the static elements of human sensory experience. For Heraclitus, that universal, ordering principle that underlies all that exists is *Logos*. All fire passes through the endless dialectical of *Logos* and finds within it a sense of order and stasis. Such a metaphysical concept also clarifies Heraclitus' understanding of ontic dualism. Taking as an assumption or foundational principle that both physical and spiritual exist, Heraclitus is

332. Vladimir de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos, as Conceived from Heraclitus until Eriugena,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 59 no. 1-4 (2014): 13-39.

able to simplify by defining them as fire and *Logos* respectively. The perennial question of how to conceptualize both change and permanence coherently is also answered by way of *Logos* for Heraclitus.³³³ Change is the realm of fire, a constant state of affairs for the world, while permanence is a product of the influence of *Logos*. This permanence should be understood as a perpetual unfolding. De Beer writes, “The manner in which the logos rules the cosmos is by determining the conflict between opposites, thereby providing a deeper unity and harmony underlying the changes flowing from the conflict (*Fragment 67*).”³³⁴ Within the phenomenal realm, *Logos* can be labeled the *between* of life.³³⁵ Finally, *Logos* answers the metaphysical question of what sets human beings apart from other animals. Humans, uniquely, are able to understand and even participate in *Logos*, indeed it is the soul’s highest task and the means of understanding the world.³³⁶

This leads to the role of *Logos* in Heraclitus’ ethics. The *Logos* is both the hermeneutical key to life and its great purpose. Although it appears that some things are good and others evil, for Heraclitus, “To God, all things are beautiful and just, but humans have supposed some just and others unjust.”³³⁷ (Notice how this idea rhymes with Augustine’s understanding that beings have “metaphysical goodness” even when humans cannot see a being’s “practical goodness.”) Moreover, “the soul has a self-

333. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 15.

334. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 15.

335. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried & Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 135.

336. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 15.

337. Heraclitus of Ephesus, “Fragment 102,” trans. Richard McKirahan, <http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html>

increasing *Logos*.³³⁸ For Heraclitus, the *Logos* was the only god, that god being rational order, which allows humans to understand *Logoi*, or the principles of life, making rational discourse possible.³³⁹ This discourse is the means of learning and of moral development. It is not the essence of *Logos*, but rather “the gatheredness of beings themselves.”³⁴⁰ *Logos* make ethical-political interaction possible. These interactions also allow for intellectual growth. *Logos*, the universe’s rational principle, is the means of learning and makes knowledge possible.

This *Logos* has both “epistemological and ontological implications, with the former deriving its reality from the latter.”³⁴¹ If *Logos* is a perpetually unfolding dialectic, then the appearance of opposites in the world, while not merely a product of sensory perception, is not definitive of what *is*. There is unity to be found between those opposites, and it is in that unity that knowledge is found. Knowledge is neither purely *a priori* or *a posteriori*; Heraclitus is neither an exclusive empiricist nor rationalist. Heraclitus connected intelligence (*nous*) with *Logos* because the environment surrounding us is “rational (*logikos*) and intelligent (*noetikos*).”³⁴² Humans inhabit the world, experience it, and learn through that experience. They become intelligent by

338. Heraclitus of Ephesus, “Fragment 115,” trans. Richard McKirahan, <http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html>

339. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008), 215.

340. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried & Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 137-138.

341. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 16.

324. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 17.

drawing in the *Logos* while breathing. In this way, humans participate in divinity and are indwelt by it.

Though *Logos* played a central role in Heraclitus' philosophy, it was raised to new heights in Platonic and, later, Stoic philosophy. It should be noted that the concept of *Logos* received considerable attention and expansion by later Neo-Platonic philosophers, and such an emphasis can color the interpretation of Plato himself, perhaps skewing interpreters to overemphasize *Logos* within Platonic thought. That said, *Logos* plays a critical role in Plato's epistemology and metaphysics, and centers more on the concept of word than previous thinkers. One common analogy, on an epistemic level, relates to the spoken or written word. For Plato, words must exist in the mind before finding expression, either written or spoken. Those expressed words then exist as a reflection, or participation within, the words as they exist in the mind. For example, if I were to greet my cat in the morning, "Hello, baby cat," I must, according to Plato, formulate those words, and the concepts they convey, first in my mind. They are, in relation to the spoken words, preexistent. *Logos* applies equally to both the preexistent word in the mind and the expressed word. Applying that analogy to the physical world, Plato developed a metaphysics in which the tangible *stuff* of the universe exist as a reflection of eternal, perfect forms. As such, *Logos* forms a bridge between the ideal world of the forms and the fallible, mutable world of *things*.³⁴³ Knowledge of that thing is only possible with the addition of *Logos*; if a thing is perceived apart from its *Logos*, its participative

343. de Beer, "The Cosmic Rule of the Logos," 17.

connectedness to its respective form, one can only hope for belief. Knowledge requires *Logos*.³⁴⁴

Zeno, and the Stoic school that followed him, developed a concept of *Logos* informed by both Heraclitus and Plato. For them, there existed an “eternal, unchanging being” one grasps by reason, as well an “ephemeral, mutable becoming” one grasps through the senses.³⁴⁵ This dual understanding of *Logos*, in which it is both outside of the sensible world and existent within the physical, reflects the duality of Platonic thought, but posits the material nature of *Logos*. Increasingly throughout the development of Stoicism, *Logos* was seen as material, culminating in the view of later Stoics, such as Marcus Aurelius, who viewed the Roman Empire as an *incarnation* of *Logos*. *Logos* also developed a religious or theological connotation; Stoic philosophers increasingly correlated their understanding of *Logos* with their concept of the One, or God.

Another shift from Platonic to Stoic thought on *Logos* is a move from the epistemic to the ethical. While *Logos* certainly played a role in Platonic ethics, the Stoics primarily considered it in the context of activity. *Logos* did not simply determine the nature of a thing or the means of one’s knowledge of thing, but the purpose and destiny of it as well. Fate and *Logos*, though not necessarily identical concepts were characteristics, aspects, or constituent parts of the first principle of the universe.³⁴⁶ The Stoics embraced a causal determinism: all that happened in life was predetermined by

344. R. C. Cross, "Logos and Forms in Plato," *Mind* 63, no. 252 (1954): 433-50. Accessed January 26, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2251498>.

345. de Beer, “The Cosmic Rule of the Logos,” 17.

346. Robert F. Dobbin (trans. and commentary), *Epictetus: Discourses Book I* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1998).

that first principle. Therefore, *Logos* was determinative. Ethical living was a matter of discerning the movement and force of the *Logos*. Thus, for the Stoics, knowledge, being, and right living were all inherently logocentric.

The concept of *Logos* found further development among the Neo-Platonic philosophers, who borrowed from Heraclitus, Plato, and the Stoic philosophers. The first and principal voice among the Neo-Platonists was Plotinus, writing during the third century CE. For Plotinus, *Logos* principally serves both a substantive and an intermediary role, it is that which is at work *between* and that which stands beneath. On a human scale, *Logos* is that which is at work between the mind, the soul, and the Good. On a cosmological scale, *Logos* is that which draws together, but also differentiates, the One, Soul, and Spirit. Seen from an epistemic point of view, *Logos* is the “expressed principle” of the highest thing, the One or the Good, found through lower things, the Intellect and Soul. Plotinus writes, Intellect is “the primary activity from the Good and the primary essence from that which remains in itself. But Intellect is active around the Good, in a way living around it. Soul dances outside this looking at it and, in contemplating its interior, looks at God through itself.”³⁴⁷ *Logos* is expressed downward; it emanates from the Good to the Intellect and then to the soul. In response, the soul expresses love for the Intellect, and by means of the Intellect to the Good. Ontologically, *Logos* provides the substrate of all that exists, and serves as the primary object of meditation. In so doing, the Soul is able to recognize the oneness of all that is, even rejoicing through an outpouring

347. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.10, in *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, ed. John Dillon and Lloyd Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), 32.

of love at the shared divinity of the universe. Once again, for Plotinus, the center of the physical universe, the ethical or good life, and knowledge, is *Logos*.

Living and writing around the turn of the Common Era, Philo of Alexandria represents a shift in logocentrism insofar as he provides a robust and significant effort not simply to develop the concept of *Logos* philosophically, but rather to develop a syncretistic religious system that incorporates both religious concepts and philosophical understandings of *Logos*. As a Jewish person writing in the cosmopolitan context of Alexandria, *Logos* in Philo's writing is "unequivocally theistic,"³⁴⁸ though he maintains the dualistic metaphysical system of the prevailing Hellenistic philosophy. Looking to the Septuagint and its frequent and plural use of the term *Logos*, Philo drew a connection between the developing philosophical concept of *Logos* as ordering and first principle or the One with the Divine mind, the utterance of God, wisdom, the Angel of the Lord, and even God.³⁴⁹ Though he is not always clear or consistent, he does seem to equate *Logos* with YHWH at times. Moving beyond his sacred text, Philo refers to the *Logos* as the first Form and the "firstborn Son of the Uncreated Father."³⁵⁰

The *Logos*, for Philo, is not a static entity, but rather an active force.³⁵¹ It is important to note that, within the Philonic tradition, *Logos* was considered the firstborn

348. de Beer, "The Cosmic Rule of the *Logos*," 20.

349. Marian Hillar, "Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E.—40 C.E.)," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/philo/#SH11h>

350. Henry Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 142.

351. An interesting conversation can be had regarding the question of whether Philo thought of the *Logos* in *personal* terms, but such an investigation would take us rather far afield.

child of God and Wisdom.³⁵² The *Logos* was the mediating factor through which God created the universe. *Logos* has the capacity for thought or, “rational seeds” which helped create the cosmos, brought into being out of non-being by the act of God.³⁵³ The *Logos* created the world and, therefore, is the ontological link between all its component parts, on the cosmic level of the universe as well as the intrapersonal level of individuals. Philo wrote, “The *Logos* of the living God is the bond of everything, holding all things together and binding all the parts, and prevents them from being dissolved and separated.”³⁵⁴ *Logos* does not simply hold the person together, but also enables rational thought and represents a divine presence within humanity.

While Philo’s conception of *Logos* does not represent a radically different view from other philosophers of his day, his unique contribution is his work to incorporate the concept into a religious system that arguably includes a cosmology significantly different from the Hellenistic metaphysic in which *Logos* was birthed and developed. It can be argued that later Stoics would also develop syncretistic systems, but they lack the mysticism and commitment to an authoritative sacred text and religious rituals found in Philo. Philo would not, however, be the last to integrate religious dogma and Greek philosophical concepts, categories, and structures. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, would forever shape Christian theology by doing just that.

352. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam’s Son and Sophia’s Prophet*, 157.

353. Edward Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/midplato/#SH6a>

354. Quoted in Gerald Friedlander, *Hellenism and Christianity* (London, England: P. Valentine, 1912), 114-115.

Contra Tertullian, St. Augustine of Hippo wrote and taught that Athens and Jerusalem were not in perpetual epistemic conflict, but, when not directly contradicted by Christian Scripture, Hellenistic philosophy could provide a wellspring of wisdom and truth. In Book VII, Chapter IX, Section 13 of his *Confessions*, he offers especial praise for certain Platonic (or to use a contemporary ascription, Neo-Platonic) writers, likely Plotinus or Porphyry.³⁵⁵ He writes:

“Thou [God] procuredst for me... certain books of the Platonists... And therein I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and divers reasons that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... That which was made by Him is “life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” And that the soul of man, though it “bears witness of the light,” yet itself “is not that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” And that “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” But that “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” This I did not read there.”³⁵⁶

Thus, while Augustine gave epistemic primacy and ultimate authority to his sacred texts, he saw no structural reason not to adopt those philosophical concepts that he found compelling. In his mind, Augustine’s theology was not syncretistic, but wholly Christian, informed and explained by Platonic thought. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his understanding of *Logos*. For Augustine, the *Logos* was the rational principle by and through which the world was created as well as the second person of the Trinity; it was a cosmological principle as well as

355. James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine Confessions*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 421-424.

356. Augustine, *Confessions* VII:9

a person. One could, in Augustine's view, truthfully say that God spoke order, and thus brought about the universe, through *Logos* while simultaneously claiming that Christ was the primary instrument of creation.³⁵⁷

In Augustine's theology, references to Divine speech as the means of creation are not merely an allusion to the creation myth of Genesis 1, but also imply something significant about his epistemology. In Augustinian thought, the spoken truth is epistemically superior to purely noetic thought. The act of expression, particularly in the form of speech, is a uniquely human—by way of the Divine—activity made possible by the *Logos*. The *Logos* in flesh, Christ, is the spoken word of the first person of the Trinity, a revelation or communication of Truth. This must be so, because uncommunicated truth is *less than* full truth, a characteristic that could not be rightfully applied to Christ. This point of view should be held in tension with the rest of Augustine's Neo-Platonic thinking, in which the tangible expression is merely a sign of a higher ideal. *Things*, either in a literal or symbolic way, exist as signs that point to a perfection that exists in the mind of God. Ascertaining the nature of that sign-relationship and the form to which the *thing* points is the work of human intellect, reflecting, exercising, and made possible by *Logos*.³⁵⁸

Between Augustine and Heidegger, there is little philosophizing of *Logos* that offers significant improvement upon or expansion of logocentric thought. Martin

357. Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity, trans. by Arthur West Haddan, Book IV, accessed November 12, 2020. <https://newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>

358. Augustine of Hippo, "On Christian Doctrine," trans. By William Schaff, Book II:3, accessed November 11, 2020. <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html>

Heidegger, however, offers a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, beginning with the Pre-Socratic philosophers and extending to his own day, of the constriction of the conception of *Logos*. In the very foundation of that tradition, Heidegger finds an understanding of *Logos* that is simultaneously less constricted and more precise than the Western philosophical tradition affords, returning to a more Heraclitean view. Reflecting on Heraclitus, he argues that *Logos* is primarily a matter of discourse and a means of bringing order, without the constraint of rationality.³⁵⁹ Here, interpreters of Heidegger diverge. One school of thought holds that discourse (*Logos*) is the linguistic expression of a rational world. Being-as-expressed-as-the-world is itself rationally ordered, and discourse about that world reflects that rational order. Another interpretation, however, does not posit a rational universe. Rather, the prelinguistic world is more akin to a Heraclitean flux, demanding discourse for intelligibility. Order, then, is not a characteristic of Being-in-the-world, but rather a necessary characteristic of discourse. In order to communicate, *Logos* must adopt some rationally understood rules, even when the subject of that discourse is not so constrained.³⁶⁰

Either interpretation of Heidegger, including those who would embrace both possibilities simply as stages in the development of his thinking, are inescapably logocentric.³⁶¹ As Rorty points out, Dasein is inescapable and thus, necessarily, so is

359. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 155-161.

360. Michael Wheeler, “Martin Heidegger,” last modified October 12, 2011, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>

361. Warnick, Barbara. “Logos in Heidegger’s Philosophy of Language.” *Philosophy Research Archives* 5 (1979): 663.

Logos.³⁶² Given *Logos*’ role in expression, narrative focalization likewise must always be present, effectively eliminating the possibility of metanarrative, a fundamental element of many classical conceptions of *Logos*.³⁶³ Language is a dynamic “house of being” that both calls the referent into being and stands as an echo of that occurrence.³⁶⁴ One’s relationship to the world is determined and mediated by language; without it both the person and Being remain in a pre-existential state.

To be sure, *Logos* has a rich philosophical and interpretive history. In these brief sketches of important thinkers’ interactions with and musings on the concept, we see a building on and returning to Heraclitean thought. His fundamental thesis proved adaptable, informing a variety of subjects in a variety of eras. These sketches also serve to demonstrate that *Logos* itself is insufficient as a construct to contain all that is. Examination through a contemporary lens reveals that *Logos*, *eo ipso*, was insufficient in each case. There is another factor, spoken or unspoken, that bears on the world. In my reading, for Heraclitus, fire and *Logos* were necessary “partners;” for Plato, *Logos* and the forms; for Marcus Aurelius, *Logos* and incarnation; for Philo, *Logos* and mysticism; for Augustine, *Logos* and human speech; and for Heidegger, *Logos* and *Dasein*. If *Logos* is insufficient, what construct might balance it to more fully obtain and hold?

362. Richard Rorty, “Two Meanings of ‘Logocentrism’: A Reply to Norris” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 107-118.

363. Jussi Backman, “Logocentrism and the Gathering Λόγος: Heidegger, Derrida, and the Contextual Centers of Meaning.” *Research in Phenomenology* 42, no. 1 (2012): 67-91.

364. Pol Vandevelde, “Language as the House of Being? How to Bring Intelligibility to Heidegger While Keeping the Excitement,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 4 (April 2014): 253-262.

The Breath

As we have seen, *Logos*, even Heideggerian *Logos* as discourse, is not large enough on its own to hold that which the Spirit encompasses. Perhaps a theology that opens space for the Spirit may not always press toward the future, nor close down from the past. Might it also integrate all of Heidegger's ideas of time as "already-Being-in," "Being-alongside," and "Ahead-of-itself" Being? I contend a Spirit-centered theology can exist, neither eliding nor seeking to replicate the past. It can exist while neither avoiding nor concretizing the future. Rather, pneumacentrism recognizes the truth in the idea that "There is no past that we can bring back by longing for it. Only a present that builds and creates itself as the past withdraws."³⁶⁵ While the Spirit cannot bring back a time, it can usher in the felt sense of the presence of God which is, of course, the aim of all our ritual and remembrance.

The Christian faith considers the Holy Spirit to be the third person of the Trinity. While the concept of the Spirit lacks as substantive a philosophical and interpretive history of *Logos*, nevertheless it is helpful as a corrective to logocentrism. In Christian conception, the Spirit fulfills several "roles," without ever really becoming a "person." Keller writes, "In the lightness of that foam, the airiness of that breath, ruach continues to be mistaken for something like nothing: an immateriality."³⁶⁶ Francis Chan even titled his book on the Holy Spirit *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*.³⁶⁷ In Christian theological spaces, the Spirit is most often considered that which

365. *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, directed by John Madden, featuring Judi Dench, Celia Imrie, Bill Nighy, Ronald Pickup, Maggie Smith, Tom Wilkinson, Penelope Wilton, & Dev Patel (Participant Media & Blueprint Pictures, 2011), Blu-Ray (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015).

366. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 236.

one receives at conversion (or after baptism, depending on one's tradition), a vivifying and sanctifying force. She was present at the creation event, pre-existing the world. In Gen 1:2, the Spirit "hovered over the face of the waters." In the world's natality, Spirit was an active force, vibrating, oscillating, thrumming over all that was.

The Christian concept of the Spirit may speak to what the Spirit *does*, but fails to give account of who (or what) the Spirit *is*. Rather than follow a development of thought around the Spirit chronologically as we did with the *Logos*, then, it is perhaps more useful to look at the roles the Spirit inhabits in Judeo-Christian thought. What follows is a brief description of Spirit as the breath of life, Spirit as the dwelling place of God, Spirit as Holy Wisdom, and Spirit as the Paraclete.

The Spirit as Breath appears in Gen 2:7, where God breathes into the brand-new humans who, as a result of being inspired, become animated.³⁶⁸ The Joban poet, reflecting on the fragile nature of human life, also links the Spirit and the breath, writing, "If he should take back his spirit to himself,/and gather to himself his breath,/all flesh would perish together,/and all mortals return to dust."³⁶⁹ For the poet, the breath of God is the source and sustainer of human life.

Perhaps no text links the Spirit and the breath so clearly as Jesus in the Johannine Pentecost. After the resurrection, while the disciples hid in fear, Jesus materialized in their presence. When they saw his wounds, he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father

367. Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).

368. "...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."

369. Job 34:14-15

has sent me, so I am sending you.”³⁷⁰ Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”³⁷¹ Rambo writes, “He breathes on them—not an exhale released from the cross, but a holy exchange of air, as a spirit is released into the room.”³⁷² Note that Jesus is not, in this text, conflated with the Spirit, but is rather the one who enables the recognition of the Spirit’s presence in the space. As the Spirit, too, is homoousias with the Creator and the Redeemer in orthodoxy, then it stands to reason that Jesus, as part of that Godhead, could exhale that in which he participates consubstantially without being conflated with such.³⁷³

From these textual examples, it would appear that the Spirit is a member of the Godhead that pre-existed the created world, is responsible for sustaining human life on earth, and that which persons may not recognize as always-already present. The contours of the Spirit appear to differ between the Hebrew scriptures and second testament: In the first testament, the Spirit inspires all that is and, if God were to withdraw God’s spirit, human life would cease to exist. In Christian thought, however, the Spirit is thought to be something one *receives* at conversion (or baptism) rather than something one merely *recognizes* as present.

370. Jn 20:21

371. Jn 20:22; καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάβετε πνεῦμα ἄγιον·

372. Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, loc. 405.

373. The Second Council of Constantinople pronounced anathema those who contended the Spirit is of a different substance from the Creator and Christ, writing, “If anyone will not confess that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one nature or substance... let him be anathema.” Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), I:201.

The idea of the Spirit as the glory of God, or the Shekinah (שכינה) is an extrabiblical construct coming from a Semitic root meaning “to dwell” and this is understood to mean “dwelling place” or “inhabitance.” It is a place wherein the Divine rests and is more readily perceived.³⁷⁴ One such occurrence of the Shekinah is the pillar of cloud and flame that led the Israelites out of bondage in the Exodus tale. The text says the pillar never left the people, but went before them. In Ex 33, God spoke to Moses from the pillar of cloud, for God could not be seen face-to-face.

Further, the prophets “saw” the Shekinah in their heavenly visions. Proto-Isaiah famously saw God sitting on a throne, the hem of whose robe filled the tabernacle. Jeremiah mentions the throne of God in chaps 14 and 17. Ezekiel has a particularly vivid recollection of an angel bringing him to the liminal space between heaven and earth, wherein it, “brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. And the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I had seen in the valley.”³⁷⁵ Ezekiel, then, had witnessed God’s glory at least once before this particular vision.

Yet the manifested Shekinah was not just a phenomenon for prophets according to the Rabbis. God’s glory may be experienced while studying Torah; when a prayer quorum gathers; when three or more persons sit as judges; and, notably over the bed of a

374. Alan Unterman, Rivka G. Horowitz, Joseph Dan, & Sharon Faye Koren, “Shekinah,” in M. Berenbaum & F. Skolnik (eds.) *Encyclopedia Judaica* (2nd ed.), Vol. 18, 440-444.

375. Ezek 8:3b-4.

sick person; or when persons are in exile, says the Talmud.³⁷⁶ The sickbed and the experience of exile have particular resonance for those who are interested in the intersection of trauma and the presence of God. Lynn Gottlieb's poem on the dwelling place of God calls forth this fullness:

Shechina
Calling us
From exile
Inside us exiled
Calling us
Home
Home.³⁷⁷

The Spirit as the dwelling place of the Holy, the place where God is more readily apparent humanly, is the place of suffering. Catherine Keller writes, "In the setting of Jewish-Christian dialog, Michael Lodahl.... glosses the Shekhinah-Spirit as one who 'tragically awaits the response of human beings to the divine flow of energy; or, in process terms, to the divine aims offered to us.'"³⁷⁸ Because God is affected by the world in process thought, the dwelling place of God is affected by trauma. Like the cloud's mist clings to both earth and sky, like the flame's smoke begins on the earth and ascends to the heavens, so, too, the Spirit inhabits the gap between the temporal and eternal.

The Spirit as Holy wisdom is present especially in Wisdom literature, and to a lesser extent, in the New Testament, where she is most often consumed by maleness.³⁷⁹

376. Talmud Sanhedrin 39a; Talmud Berachot 6a; Talmud Shabbat 12b; Talmud Megillah 29a.

377. Lynn Gottlieb, "Speaking into the Silence," *Response* 41-2 (Fall-Winter 1982), 27.

378. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 235.

379. Jantzen conveys that, especially in the writings of Paul, "No overt comment is made on the substitution of gender [female Wisdom or Sophia into male Logos]: none is necessary for the text to do its work of teaching the subordination of women (Col. 1:13-20; 3:18f)." She goes on to write "Perhaps the passage which had the greatest influence of all on the transformation of Sophia into Logos is the Prologue

Please permit me a brief excursus: I want to be clear that I am *not* after a wisdom Christology here. Certainly, wisdom Christology is needful and serves as a corrective to the hypermasculinization of Jesus and, by extension, the Godhead.³⁸⁰ Ellen Leonard writes, “While recognizing the maleness of Jesus as part of his historical specificity, the distorted theological use of the maleness of Jesus is challenged by the blend of female and male imagery in Jesus/Sophia. All who are disciples of Jesus/Sophia can do the works of Sophia.”³⁸¹ Jantzen adds, “In the course of the development of Christian thinking, all of this [the loss of the feminine in Judeo-Christian tradition] was reinforced by the transformation of the female Wisdom or Sophia into the male Logos.”³⁸² This is true and important. However, I am here seeking not to expand the role of Jesus as the all-consuming substance and exemplar of the faith, but rather bring balance to bear for the oft-forgotten member of the Trinity known as Spirit, performing the role of Sophia/Wisdom.

to the fourth gospel, in which the Logos is described in terms which, but for their gender, are strongly reminiscent of the Wisdom passages of the Hebrew Bible.... The message is clear: Jesus the incarnate Logos is the Wisdom of God, now firmly male.... In such a context, it is only a short step from the Word to the words, the written scriptures as revelatory of God.” Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 65.

380. Those interested in reading more on wisdom Christology, see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985); Elizabeth Johnson, “Jesus the Wisdom of God,” *Ephemerides Theologiae Lovenienses* 61 (1985): 261-294; Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983), 116-138.

381. Ellen Leonard, “Woman and Christ: Toward Inclusive Christologies,” in *The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2016).

382. Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65.

Woman Wisdom is spoken of most eloquently and robustly and, I would argue, most Divinely, in the deuterocanonical book Wisdom of Solomon. Note Wisdom 7:22-23, 25, 27:

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.
For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets

Here, Wisdom is figured as “a breath of the power of God,” which is not unlike how the Spirit is styled as breath in numerous texts found in the Hebrew Scriptures.³⁸³ As Schüssler Fiorenza notes, it is impossible “sharply to divide Wisdom and Apocalyptic traditions.”³⁸⁴ She goes on, “Woman wisdom is the leader on the way, preacher in Israel, architect of the world. She is called sister, spouse, mother, beloved, and teacher.... She offers life, knowledge rest, and salvation to all those who will accept her.... Moreover, Apocalyptic-Wisdom theology knows Divine Woman Wisdom has sought a resting place among her people...”³⁸⁵

383. E.g., Prov 8:22-31; Ps 33:6; Job 26:13, 33:4; 2 Sam 22:16; Ezek 21:31.

384. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 146.

385. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 147-148.

Woman Wisdom fulfills many roles in these co-occurring traditions. She is no less than the glory of God, the mediation between YHWH and Israel, renewer of the cosmos, loving Spirit, ruling power of God, and the image of God's goodness.³⁸⁶ Jantzen adds, "The descriptions of Wisdom in this passage are inescapably descriptions of God: she can do all things, renew all things, and she orders all things well from one end of the earth to the other."³⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza goes on to note, "Chokmah/Sophia is the personification of Jewish Wisdom theology as the generative matrix."³⁸⁸ Sophia has "assumed the functions of the Spirit."³⁸⁹ The Spirit as Wisdom is a guide for humanity, looking for reception. The Spirit as Wisdom is mostly conceived as She who waits for human recognition.

As the Paraclete, the Spirit is a more active force. The *παράκλητος* is the one who comes alongside as a helper or advocate. The word appears four times in the Gospel of John, and once in 1 John in the biblical text. In the New Testament, it is translated variously as Helper, Advocate, Counselor, and Intercessor.³⁹⁰ In its first appearance, the word Paraclete is described as "another," implying that Jesus, too, is such a helper or advocate.³⁹¹ In this passage, the Paraclete is also the "Spirit of truth." In each use in the

386. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 148.

387. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 63.

388. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 153.

389. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 160.

390. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*. Updated ed. La Habra: Lockman Foundation, 1995. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3875.htm>

391. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

Gospel of John, the Paraclete is one who will come to Jesus' followers after Jesus' departure.³⁹² In 1 Jn 2, the Paraclete is Jesus, interceding for the people with the "Father."³⁹³ This is a marked difference from the earlier functions of the Spirit, whose presence was with God from the foundations of the earth and who has been with her people throughout human history.

Yet the word does not have only spiritual meanings. For example, Philo uses paraclete humanly to refer to a helper or mediator.³⁹⁴ Perhaps this theological space, then, represents not only a God-sent divine advocate, but also a God-ordained human helper. Is there space for both Spirit and *Logos* in trauma healing? Words are often considered a healer's primary currency. For Christians, Jesus as the *Logos* has long been a central tenet of our faith, but the supremacy of Jesus, at least in Western iterations of Christianity, has overshadowed the Spirit's function. The idea that words—and the Word—are insufficient for a life of fullness should not be problematic for Christians in the least. For a faith tradition that conceives of the Godhead as a Trinity, with each part needful, space for the Spirit to breathe and work and heal should be a most welcome corrective to an airless, stifling orthodoxy. The fear, of course, is that opening space for the Spirit is opening space for the unknown and unknowable. And that is exactly the risk—and gift—of what Keller calls the "apophatic infinite."³⁹⁵

392. Rambo writes of these Johannine appearances, "The paraclete (Greek, *paráklētos*) and the Holy Ghost are in the air, in the breath. The gospel writers tell us that this story is not completed and, in fact, can never be." Rambo, *Resurrection Wounds*, loc. 429.

393. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

394. Philo of Alexandria, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.237; *De Opificio Mundi* 23.

The Spoken and the Unspoken

The ancient tradition of apophysis, or negative theology, concerns itself with the infinity called “God.” It says and unsays talk about that God. It falls speechless before a mystery that inspires more speech in the next moment. Surely the paradox entailed in this traditional apophatic gesture is mind-bending enough—speaking as unspeaking, knowing as unknowing, darkness as light—to keep us occupied for all these pages. The apophatic mystics—Jewish, Christian, Muslim—do surely speak. They speak and unspeak volumes. With uninhibited kataphasis (the presumed affirmative opposite of apophysis), at once confessional and speculative, liturgical and philosophical, they speak about God. The more they speak, the more they unspeak; and yet because of the infinity of which they speak, it would seem they can never stop speaking.³⁹⁶

Boesel and Keller (2010) point out the obvious problems with any discussion on kataphasis and apophysis on the very first page of their edited volume on negation, incarnation, and reality. To share information on the unspeakable, one must communicate via some means, very often in speech or writing, perhaps less often (or at least less often considered), through behavior and interpersonal neurobiology.³⁹⁷ Keller warns, “Theos as logos: it speaks to us in the ancient cipher of an unknown that instantly attracts our attention, even as it escapes all retention.”³⁹⁸ For every kataphatic claim one makes, one must also recognize the inherent limits of language, particularly the language we use to represent the ineffable. Words cannot contain any construct, and are certainly insufficient

395. Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 9.

396. Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, introduction to *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, eds. Chris Boesel, and Catherine Keller (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010), 1.

397. Interpersonal neurobiology is the process by which bodies, specifically mirror neurons, communicate from one person to another on non-verbal and sub-verbal levels. See Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight: Transform Your Brain with the New Science of Empathy* (London, England: OneWorld Publications, 2011) for an accessible read on this important subject.

398. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 72.

to capture the essence of the Holy, whether they are fashioned in the positive or the negative. Yet as the written word is our medium here, and has been a primary means of setting down and preserving ideas for millennia, we shall proceed in hopes of offering something to the conversation around the spoken and speakable, the unspoken and unspeakable as it relates to trauma recovery. I suggest both are necessary in post-traumatic spirituality, though only with deep humility, facilitated by unknowing, are we able to communicate both healthfully.

The Spoken and the Unspoken

That which we affirm about God is known as kataphatic theology. Kataphasis comes from the Greek κατάφασις, meaning “an affirmative proposition.”³⁹⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite (also known as Pseudo-Denys) is the first known Christian thinker to write on kataphasis and apophasis and apply the terms to Christian theology.⁴⁰⁰ Keller notes, “It is Dionysian Plotinianism, sharpened through Proclus—who had first used the terms *kataphatic* and *apophatic* to describe opposing theological gestures...”⁴⁰¹ In his important book *The Darkness of God*, Denys Turner defines kataphasis as,

“...the verbose element in theology, it is the Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God... It is the cataphatic in theology which causes its metaphor-ridden character, causes it to borrow vocabularies by analogy from many another discourse, whether of science, literature, art, sex, politics, the law, the economy, family life, warfare, play, teaching, physiology, or whatever.... And when we have said that much, narrowly, about the formal language of theology, we have only begun: for that is

399. Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, s. v. “κατάφασις,” accessed January 6, 2021, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dkata%2Ffasis>

400. Scott D. Moringello, “Kataphasis, Apophasis and Mysticism in Pseudo-Denys and Wittgenstein” in *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 987 (2003): 220-29.

401. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 70, italics retained.

to say nothing about the extensive non-verbal vocabulary of theology, its liturgical and sacramental action, its music, its architecture, its dance and gesture, all of which are intrinsic to its character as an *expressive* discourse, a discourse of theological articulation.”⁴⁰²

In many liturgical Christian churches, we affirm who God is in our weekly gathering, reciting a creed or statement of faith. In my own United Church of Christ congregation, we recite the Apostles’ Creed each week, which is an example of a kataphatic statement of belief:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under
Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father
almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the
forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.⁴⁰³

Any work that affirms the identity and character of the Holy may be said to be kataphatic in nature, though of course the unsaid and unsayable is always already there, vibrantly present, in all our affirmation. For to speak of anything the Holy may be, the apophatic opposite is there, too: If we say God is love, we unsay that God is not hate. If we say God is always, already present; we unsay that God has not abandoned us. Michael Sells writes, “The term apophasis is commonly paired with kataphasis (affirmation,

402. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20.

403. Reformed Church in America, “The Apostles’ Creed,”
<https://www.rca.org/about/theology/creeds-and-confessions/the-apostles-creed/>

saying, speaking-with). Every act of unsaying demands or presupposes a previous saying.”⁴⁰⁴ This is one meaning of apophysis, but we are after something more here.

What we affirm about God and the world is important. Yet when what we believe about the Holy becomes more than affirmation, when it hardens into an orthodoxy that leaves no space for plural voices or multiple experiences, affirmation for some becomes disaffirmation for many others. Much like trauma itself, harsh orthodoxy closes down what was designed to open out, allowing only certain words and questions to speak to an experience that cannot fully be named. If kataphasis is not balanced by an apophatic understanding of the Divine, not only do we lose out on the richness of the unknown, we also miss out on the gifts of unknowing.

When words fail (or the Word fails), one must search for God, too, in that which does not require words. In theological discourse, we call this apophysis as well. The second clause of Irenaeus’ famous statement says, “...and the life of man consists in beholding God.” For Irenaeus, human life consists not in *speaking* of God, but in *witnessing* God. For the anonymous mystic who penned *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the fourteenth century, the experience of unknowing is co-created and experiential: “But now you put me a question and say: ‘How might I think of God in Godself, and what is God?’ And to this I can only answer thus: ‘I have no idea.’ For with your question you have brought me into that same darkness, into that same cloud of unknowing in which I wish you were yourself.”⁴⁰⁵

404. Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3.

405. Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), 130; translation adjusted for clarity.

When words fail and only fragmentary, often horrifying, images remain, one may find the Holy in the space words cannot reach. In *Cloud of the Impossible*, Catherine Keller talks of the “apophatic infinite,” that of God which is unsayable and therefore wholly experiential. The apophatic, then, is essential to coming to experience God, self, and the world again in safety.

If the body of literature on kataphasis is somewhat limited, literature on apophysis, paradoxically, abounds. In Greek, ἀπόφασις comes from ἀπόφημι, “to say no.”⁴⁰⁶ Denys Turner defines apophysis as,

...the name of that theology which is done against the background of human ignorance of the nature of God. It is the doing of theology in the light of the statement of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, that ‘we do not know what kind of being God is’. It is the conception of theology not as a naïve-critical ignorance of God, but as a kind of acquired ignorance, a *docta ignorantia* as Nicholas of Cusa called it in the fifteenth century. It is the conception of theology as a strategy and practice of unknowing, as the fourteenth-century English mystic called it, who, we might say, invented the transitive verb-form ‘to unknow’ in order to describe theological knowledge, in this its deconstructive mode. Finally, ‘apophaticism’ is the same as what the Latin tradition of Christianity called the *via negativa*, ‘the negative way’. These are among the things which are meant by the term ‘apophaticism’.⁴⁰⁷

This “acquired ignorance” of which Turner writes is the negation of the logos, and “therewith knowledge in the sense of discourse based on logical reasoning and verbal expression,” Franke writes, “It has run parallel to the mainstream thinking of the logos, often intersecting and overlapping with it.”⁴⁰⁸ Or, put another way, kataphasis and apophysis always come back to one another in a kind of conversation. Franke is clear that

406. Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, s. v. “ἀπόφασις,” accessed January 6, 2021, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dkata%2Ffasis>

407. Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 19.

apophysis can actually be apprehended only in discourse (we must remember that painting and music, too, are their own kind of “discourse”), but in discourse only insofar as it negates itself and tends to disappear as discourse—sometimes being sublated into non-verbal media. The many different sorts of discourses that do this may be considered together generically as “apophatic discourse.” The exigency of bringing out what all discourse leaves unsaid—what, nevertheless, by its very elusiveness, teases or disturbs speech, and tends therefore systematically to be covered over or suppressed, so as to be rendered almost completely imperceptible—features conspicuously and more or less consciously in this loosely-defined lineage of writers (in various media) stretching across the entire history of Western intellectual tradition (Franke p. 28).

Similarly, Turner describes apophysis as “the collapse of ordinary language.”⁴⁰⁹

For Keller, language is “falling away, being unsaid.”⁴¹⁰ This framing of apophatic discourse rhymes with the way trauma “speaks.” Whether verbalized or not, trauma surfaces in the in-between of discourse because trauma is embodied and discourse is, by definition, an interpersonal enterprise. What emerges as needful is not, then, a different way of framing trauma, but rather the recognition that one cannot but say and unsay simultaneously. The saying and unsaying weaves its way through all our interactions with one another. Keller writes, “... I picture the twining of the kataphatic and apophatic as genetic strands not held together in a third ‘way,’ but affecting it at each twist, each fold, of their intersection.” She goes on, “The tension between the apophatic and the kataphatic then does not transcend apophysis but is its own precipitant.”⁴¹¹ And round and round we go.

408. Franke, William , “Learned ignorance,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, ed. Matthias Gross and Linsey McGahey (Abingdon: Routledge, 26 May 2015), accessed 10 Jan 2021, Routledge Handbooks Online.

409. Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 26.

410. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 73.

411. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 74-75.

If we conceive of God as that which cannot fully be spoken, unspeakability comes alongside trauma and creates a liminal space for a new experience. Because God is becoming-in-relationship, God knows trauma, experiences trauma within Godself, and refuses to leave us alone in it. There is a place where the unspeakability of trauma and the unspeakability of God meet. The horror of unspeakability can be transformed into holy silence, something like unspokenness—the past and present terror is held in the fullness of the Holy’s presence.

While apophysis is critical for correcting orthodox certainty and opening space for transformation, it is yet insufficient on its own merits. This is partly because, as noted above, these constructs are deeply entwined. It is also insufficient because one significant goal of trauma recovery is to restore language around the trauma event, helping the survivor form a narrative of the event so the brain can process and store it properly. Holding in tension these ideas, I suggest healthy unknowing is the precipitant to inviting the Holy into the place of trauma healing.

The Place of Unknowing

Cathy Caruth describes the dynamic of trauma as “complex ways of knowing and not knowing.”⁴¹² Yet theology as a discipline has often doubled down on certitude in response to trauma with respect to both theology and theodicy. Catherine Keller writes, “Theology in the Abrahamic register has often answered trauma by ramping up certainty.”⁴¹³ Certainty, however, is the very mechanism that holds trauma survivors in

412. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 4.

413. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 16.

the clutch of the worst of their life's experiences. Being willing to engage some degree of unknowing is precisely that which makes new knowledge possible.⁴¹⁴ The space of unknowing is more than an apophasic move toward unsaying. Rather, it holds space for doubt and hope, death and life, and fear and courage, all toward the end of becoming.

Catherine Keller calls theology "an incantation at the edge of uncertainty."⁴¹⁵ Doubt and its synonyms (perplexity, uncertainty, confusion, disbelief), hold space for moving into one's trauma and coming to understand it and the world differently. Doubting the goodness of the self and the world is a fundamental diagnostic criterion of PTSD. Yet in the post-traumatic reach for control, doubt hardens into cynical certainty that the future will be no better than the lived past. Is there space to create (or, rather, co-create) a doubt makes peace with, even flourishes in, uncertainty?

I suggest doubt is among the most useful constructs for moving toward unknowing in healthy post-traumatic spirituality. A brief discussion of aporia is useful at this juncture. The word has been defined variously, but for the purposes of this project, we will attend to its literal, philosophical, and rhetorical renderings. Its etymology is Greek (ἀποία), literally meaning "no passage" or "impassable." In philosophy, aporia refers to "a difficulty encountered in establishing the theoretical truth of a proposition, created by the presence of evidence both for and against it."⁴¹⁶ A post-traumatic spirituality must weigh the evidence for and against the proposition of returning to a

414. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 23.

415. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 226.

416. Wordreference.com, s.v. aporia,
<https://www.wordreference.com/definition/aporia#:~:text=Rhetoricthe%20expression%20of%20a,both%20for%20and%20against%20it>.

place of being “fully alive.” In rhetoric, aporia signifies doubt, real or feigned, about an argument. The rhetorical uses of aporia are useful in both clinical and pastoral situations, to which we will turn in chapters 11 and 12, respectively.

It is clear how these usages rhyme with post-traumatic spirituality. The trauma event seems to signify a lack of passage, no way to move through the trauma and “live and move and have our being.”⁴¹⁷ Doubt is so often seen as the enemy of faith, yet I contend it is essential to recovering “life...to the full”⁴¹⁸ after trauma. Keller writes, “The event of aporia—the thwartings of our presuppositions, our reason, our best reasons—drives deconstruction... ”.⁴¹⁹ She goes on to write, “...in the acute paradox [of creatable-creature-creator], the aporia of their unexpected co-incident, the familiar image of the creating creator is unsaid (*deconstructed*, not *destroyed*)... ”.⁴²⁰ “Deconstructed, not destroyed” depicts powerfully the post-traumatic world, including the memory of the trauma event, the life of the individual, and the inability to give voice to what has transpired. Aporia, the place where meaning is superposed, creates an and/and rather than an either/or. For a healthy post-traumatic spirituality to obtain, it must recognize the and/and nature of seemingly contradictory things; doubt and hope, death and life, fear and courage. It is toward those and/ands we turn now.

417. Acts 17:28

418. Jn 10:10

419. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 101.

420. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 105, italics supplied.

Becoming-in-Relationship: A Post-Traumatic Theology

We return now to Irenaeus' quote, "The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God."⁴²¹ If the glory of God is the living person and the *imago Dei* itself a reflection of the life of the Creator then it stands to reason there is, in the human creature, an inherent impulse toward life. Yet the function of trauma is to close down the capacity for *becoming*, what Marcel calls "ontological exigency."⁴²² The living (note the participle) person is the glory of God; living's opposite, then, is the traumatic experiences that threaten dying. These traumatic experiences close down living and becoming, diminishing the glory of God and threatening to extinguish it altogether. How, then, might we reclaim becoming in a post-traumatic spirituality? I contend the answer to that is living into the fullness of the and/ands of aporia.

The place of becoming in trauma healing is one in which both the Word and the Spirit are needful, where the spoken and the unspoken are expressed, where knowing and unknowing are allowed to do their respective works. It is a place where the dichotomous, polarized, thinking of trauma gives way to an and/and experience of the world, where survivors can hold together the seemingly-contradictory constructs of doubt and hope, death and life, fear and courage.⁴²³ The contradictions are not merely rhetorical, nor are

421. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:7.

422. Anderson defines ontological exigency as, "the deep inner urge or demand for being." Thomas C. Anderson, *Commentary on Gabriel Marcel's The Mystery of Being*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006), 118.

423. Oshio writes, "Dichotomous thinking is an individual's propensity to think in terms of binary opposition, such as 'black or white,' 'good or bad,' and 'all or nothing.'" Atsushi Oshio, "An All-or-Nothing Thinking Turns into Darkness: Relations Between Dichotomous Thinking and Personality Disorders," *Japanese Psychological Research* 54, no. 4 (November 2012): 424.

they simple moments of synthesis. Rather, they are abiding ontic and epistemic realities of post-traumatic living. This is the place where one refuses to move away from one pole to embrace the other, but rather plants oneself firmly in the dual-realities of the world. It is the place of “even so,” wherein one holds together both doubt and hope as needful, protective, and holy. It is the place wherein one recognizes that the force of death is always already present, but so, too, is life to the full. It is the place wherein neither fear is elided in favor of simplicity. This is the place where one may behold God. This is the place of aporia, where meaning is superposed, not superimposed.

While superimposing is the act of layering one thing over another to force a particular perspective, superposing is the act of placing something on or above something else, such that they coincide, or placing “(one figure) in the space occupied by another, so that the two figures coincide throughout their whole extent.”⁴²⁴ The implications of the former for trauma work call to mind common mistakes individuals make when trying to help survivors. For example, when those hearing trauma stories lack the capacity to hold the stories and the story-teller, they often employ a thought-terminating cliché,⁴²⁵ such as “It was all God’s plan.” In so doing, they are forcing their perspective on a survivor, a perspective which is damaging for all the reasons discussed in the theodicy chapter.

This is one reason good trauma therapy takes so much time, incidentally. The neural networks between the trauma event and the attendant emotions it sparks are strong by design. The brain is trying to protect the person from dying; one could say the brain

424. Merriam-Webster, s.v. *Superpose*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superpose>; Merriam-Webster, s.v. *Superimpose*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superimpose>; Dictionary.com, s.v., *Superpose*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/superpose>

425. Lifton is believed to have been the first to use the phrase “thought-terminating cliché” in his book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 429.

has a hair-trigger mechanism when it comes to identifying potential threat. Trying to force a new perspective is difficult at best and damaging at worst, for it removes the protective mechanisms the survivor have relied on to survive. Overlaying new neural pathways attempts to superimpose the new atop the old and force the new perspective. The helper does not often succeed. The older network is stronger and more densely bundled, and the brain seeks the path of least resistance, the “easy road.”⁴²⁶ Some trauma therapies seek instead to re-wire the brain by helping old pathways to unbundle and new pathways to form. This is the rugged path toward change, or superposing.

Superposing allows the listener to think with the survivor, to open a tiny space of doubt where certainty once reigned. It allows for the use of aporia rhetorically, asking the survivor if there is any place in their hopeless certainty for another possibility to obtain. Superposing allows both views to have their place and does not force the perspective of one on the other as superimposing does. Superposing most closely matches the activity of God as understood by process theology. This God invites rather than requires, persuades rather than coerces. Because God is in process, becoming along with all that is created, the possibility exists for persons to choose healing. In the three and/ands of aporia—doubt and hope, fear and courage, death and life—survivor, listener, and the Holy are drawn into an intimate circle of becoming.

Doubt

And the trick of having faith, he said, was that it was necessary to believe in God *without* any great or even remotely reassuring evidence that we don't inhabit a

426. Clinical decision-making with trauma survivors is based on many factors, including, but not limited to, comorbid disorders, psychopharmacological considerations, type and frequency of traumas experienced, clinician training, client consent, and insurance reimbursement.

godless universe... he reassured us that doubt was the essence of faith, and not faith's opposite.⁴²⁷

Doubt, as noted in the previous chapter, is critical to trauma healing. What people sometimes call doubt is really the opposite thereof: it is a pattern of cynical certainty one often sees in trauma survivors, and it serves to try to protect the survivor from further harm. To this end, trauma survivors are often unwilling or unable to engage any experiences that remind them of the trauma event. For example, those who have been in traumatic car accidents are often unwilling to drive or be a passenger in a motor vehicle. While to the non- or differently-traumatized, it might seem ridiculous not to travel by car, the refusal lay in the certainty that harm *will* come again if the survivor hazards such travel. I do not call that doubt, but rather fixedness (more on that below). If we recall Irenaeus' theology, fixedness refers to the order in the world revealed to, and by, the creation in the Christ figure. This fixedness makes the revelation of the Word useful for the revelation of the glory of God.⁴²⁸ In classical theism, "God is unaffected by the world; this is the central meaning of impassibility, a word whose Latin roots mean 'lack of suffering.'"⁴²⁹ Let us recall that aporia, too, is the place of impassibility. Yet aporetic impasse makes space for doubt and hope to obtain together. Process theology affirms that God is "vulnerable to the world."⁴³⁰ Far from a detached, distracted Deity, this Being is subject to the movement of humanity and is moved by our trauma.

427. John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany: A Novel* (New York, NY: Garp Enterprises, 1989), 114.

428. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:7

429. Viney, "God as the Most and Best Moved Mover: Hartshorne's Importance for Philosophical Theology," 10.

430. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 131.

Gen 1:26 says God made humanity in God's image and likeness (בָּרָא מִתְּנִי). Given that the human condition is characterized by pain and joy, it stands to reason that God, too, experiences a grief that feels like death when God's people face trauma. Far from the Aristotelian conception of a sublimely blissful Unmoved Mover, this God is *deeply* moved by the pain of the created world. Abraham Heschel calls the Holy "the Most Moved Mover."⁴³¹ Charles Hartshorne, in response to Heschel, refers to that God as "the Most and Best Moved Mover," "the Divine Relativity."⁴³² Whereas the Unmoved Mover is unaffected by the world, impassable, and absolute, the Most Moved Mover dismantles a causal hierarchy and defies Thomistic immutability.⁴³³ God is moved by human trauma, changed by it.⁴³⁴ Wolsterstorff writes, "...the Hebrew and Christian scriptures unmistakably present God as vulnerable."⁴³⁵ Luther, too, offers a corrective to divine impassibility in his notion of the *Deus crucifixus*: the crucified *God* (not merely the crucified *Christ*). Douglas John Hall writes, "It is an astonishing thing when God's willing solidarity with suffering creation is experienced by human beings. It is entirely surprising, unanticipated,

431. Abraham J. Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1997), 25.

432. Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, ed. Mohammad Valady (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1997), 6.

433. Donald Wayne Viney, "God as the Most and Best Moved Mover: Hartshorne's Importance for Philosophical Theology," *The Midwest Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2006).

434. Though his conclusions differ from my own, Kitamori offers an extensive treatment of Divine suffering (i.e., "the pain of God"), grounded in Jeremiah and visible in the cross. Written after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the book is imminently readable and incredibly important; see Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 5th ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

435. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans., 2007), 106.

unpredictable, for it is not at all what either religion or reason could or should or does expect.”⁴³⁶ Heschel and Hartshorne are process theologians; Wolterstorff, Luther, and Hall are not and therefore would not make process claims. Yet even in their differing views of the interaction of the Holy with the world, all of the above recognize the vulnerability and possibility of God.

My work represents instead a bottom-up approach. Rather than assuming or taking on faith a view of the Divine and then forcing persons to fit often harmful categorical requirements, the human experience provides a foundation for reflection on the Holy. This privileging of persons invites speech, pushes back against silencing, and continually keeps in view those on the margins. These silenced, traumatized ones speak to the truth of God in a way that neither Platonic philosophy nor Thomistic theology can make space for and opens the way for a theology of Divine pathos, a theology of reciprocating relationships, a theology of becoming.

If God and the world are in relationship, the Divine pathos requires Divine suffering. For Heschel, the dynamic of pathos is “composed of revelation and response, of receptivity and spontaneity, of event and experience.”⁴³⁷ One loss of classical theism is the idea of an Absolute deity, one who stands outside of the world and looks on impassively. What is fundamentally a negative assertion can be replaced with a positive ascription, a shift from apophysis to kataphasis, while maintaining space for the new learning that attends unknowing. If an absolute God has failed to obtain in postmodern

436. Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2003), 23.

437. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), xxii.

theology, what hope have we? A reasonable hope, I contend, and a hope grounded in the healing potential of divine and human relationships.

Nicholas of Cusa writes, “Therefore, you are moved with me and never cease from moving so long as I am moved.”⁴³⁸ God may be understood, through the lens of process theology, as the Most and Best Moved Mover precisely because God feels, and is felt by, all of creation. Our living and moving and being is held in God. If we agree with process thought that God, too, is becoming, then our failing to become impacts the becoming of the rest of the world and of the Holy One; this is basic systems theory.⁴³⁹ One cannot “become” in a vacuum—panentheism simply precludes it. Humans enter, at birth, an earth in process, and thus God is always already with the world, suffering with, becoming with, moving with. This vision offers a beatific preview of post-traumatic spirituality; what is true of the Holy and creation is paralleled in human experience. In a state of post-traumatic flourishing, relationships are not static, and neither is the internal reality of the trauma survivor; survivors are becoming internally and, simultaneously, in relationship with others and God.

In addition, I suggest we may allow our view of God to shift from infinitude to non-finitude. This is not to suggest the Holy is finite, of course. Rather, the move to non-finitude corrects the theological mistakes of unchangingness, omnipotence, omniscience,

438. Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei*, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. and trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist, 1997), 232.

439. Systems theory has many and broad applications by definition. For an overview of general systems theory, see Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York, NY: George Braziller, revised edition 1976). For applications to psychotherapy, see Michael E. Kerr, *Bowen Theory's Secrets: Revealing the Hidden Life of Families* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

and “unsympathetic goodness.”⁴⁴⁰ In those ideas, the possibility for God’s deep mutual interaction with the world is lost. Hartshorne writes, “‘Infinite’ was a favorite word among classical theists; but they cannot be said to have explored with due care its possible meanings. In any case ‘not finite’ is not a negation, and the significance of the negative depends on that of the positive which is negated.”⁴⁴¹ He contends, then, that God’s infinitude as conceived by classical theism is “meaningless, contradictory, or empty *mere* infinity.”⁴⁴²

A shift to non-finitude corrects some of the failures of classical theism and its attendant Divine characteristics (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience). For example, it avoids Platonic “perfection” and emphasizes dynamism. It also leaves more space for apophasis as a valid unknowing. In the space of non-finitude, God may be inferred even when unseen. In English, the three primary types of non-finite verbs are infinitives, gerunds, and participles. It is in the participles of God we have grounded our discussion, specifically the ideas of being and becoming. If we conceive of God as non-finite, a space opens for the Holy’s true participation in the life of the created world. It is in this place God is most accessible to the world.

440. Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984), 4. For a fuller treatment of these and other “theological mistakes” of classical theism as conceived in process thought, see Hartshorne’s book above.

441. Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 7.

442. Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 47, italics retained. A claim of Divine infinity is the starting point for many a systematic theology. If, such theologians claim, the Holy is infinite, then the Holy is also omniscient and omnipresent. Further such claims may be made about the world. William Lane Craig, for example, offers a *reductio ad absurdum* on the concept of infinity to argue the Deity *must* exist outside of time (and, by extension, that the universe must have a definite point of origin in time). William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1979).

For Tillich, religion is the locus of being, and therefore the place where the power of being, and even the courage to be, is most accessible. He is careful to note that doubt is beneficial, but “total doubt” is what produces emptiness and meaninglessness.⁴⁴³ I would read Tillich’s concept of total doubt rather as fixedness. Mysticism—decidedly apophatic in nature—is the place in which the courage to be is most successfully accessed in the individual, where “the individual self strives for a participation in the ground of being which approaches identification.”⁴⁴⁴ Importantly, he writes, “the ultimate meaning is not something definite but the abyss of every definite meaning.”⁴⁴⁵ This is one way doubt serves to open space for trauma healing.

What if every traumatic end is only *an* end, not *the* end, the edges of which serves to show us more deeply how related we are to God and the world? Keller offers an alternative to the world-closing effect of trauma here: “What if, upon contemplation, every edge, every *eschatos* of space or time, appears as a fold of a tangle of further relation?”⁴⁴⁶ On the edges of doubt—doubt of the God of classical theism and doubt that makes possible a new means of belief post-trauma—lay the *eschatos* of hope. I contend, as part of the and/or aporetic nature of becoming in trauma healing, doubt makes a way for, and gives way to, hope.

443. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 48.

444. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 157.

445. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 158-159.

446. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 21.

Hope

For Irenaeus, to live—that is, to be a living person—is to be both held in God and to know God.⁴⁴⁷ Trauma is defined as that which threatens death, literally or metaphorically, and closes down becoming. The place of trauma is the place where doubt hardens into fixedness and hope seems lost. Yet in the and/and of aporia, it is doubt that makes post-traumatic hope possible. To become fully alive after trauma is to return to an originary hope, one that has witnessed that death and chosen to hope anyway.

Few philosophers have written so expansively on the import and necessities of hope as Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), a French thinker in whose lifetime both World Wars occurred. Marcel wrote voluminously, not only as a philosopher, but also as a dramatist, drama critic, and musician and who considered himself primarily a dramatic writer. Raised an agnostic, he converted to Roman Catholicism in 1929, a conversion presaged by a number of his philosophical commitments. Though he is usually classified as a Christian or theistic existentialist, his work is highly eclectic and contains “...elements of phenomenology, existentialism, idealism, and empiricism all consorting together in symbiotic bliss, it completely defies classification.”⁴⁴⁸ Marcel’s work is grounded in the rejection of the Cartesian self (see chap. 4 for a brief discussion of Descartes’ ideas of selfhood) and its resultant epistemology.

Hope, for Marcel, “is essentially the availability of a soul that has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will

447. “It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God.” Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:5.

448. Kenneth T. Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (1962; repr., Providence, RI: Cluny Books, 2020), 84.

and knowledge the transcendent act—the act establishing the vital regeneration of which this experience affords both the pledge and the firstfruits.”⁴⁴⁹ That is, hope is the place where I and the Other come together to experience something *more*. It “consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all inventories and all calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me, which cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserves to be willed and is, in fact, willed by the whole of my being.”⁴⁵⁰ Notice how this construction of hope rhymes with Barth’s definition, “Hope is the act of taking the next step.”⁴⁵¹ Hope is an inward stance to multiple stimuli: the externally apparent reality of distress with concomitant angst and the inexplicable experience of a transcending other. The temptation to state that such stimuli are exclusively *at odds* or *working against* one another fails to take into account the full mystery of hope, out of which the subjective stance arises and flourishes.

Hope is, therefore, an expression of ontological exigency, the irrepressible human urge towards transcendence. It “is engaged in the weaving of experience now in process, or, in other words, is an adventure now going forward.”⁴⁵² Importantly, for Marcel, hope was that which transcends time. In terms of trauma recovery, his words have a real resonance. We could scan the loss of becoming in trauma as despair (and what Weingarten will call “doubt, contradiction, and despair”⁴⁵³ in the next chapter) in reading

449. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. E. Crawford (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 67.

450. Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, (New York, NY: Carol Publishing, 1995), 28.

451. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*, 3 [33] (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1962), 938f.

452. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 52.

his words: “despair is in a certain sense the consciousness of time as closed or, more exactly still, of time as a prison … hope appears as piercing through time; everything happens as though time, instead of hedging consciousness round, allowed something to pass through it.”⁴⁵⁴ Because of its ability to pierce time, hope has a “prophetic character.”⁴⁵⁵ He goes on, “If time is in its essence a separation and as it were a perpetual splitting up of the self in relation to itself, hope on the contrary aims at reunion, at recollection, at reconciliation; in that way, and in that way alone, it might be called a memory of the future.”⁴⁵⁶

Making note of the participial and participatory nature of hope, Paul Marcus writes,

What needs to be emphasised here is that for Marcel hope is better conceived as “hoping,” that is, the phenomenology of hope reveals that it is not simply a fixed idea that one possesses in one’s head as it were, but rather it is a process-driven, emergent, and renewable psychological and behavioural activity that tends to upsurge in particular challenging contexts, in “extreme” situations of imprisonment. In other words, the despairing person feels the tight grip of the horror of the past, whereas the hoping person attempts to loosen its interpretive grip through imagining a better future. To hope is to wait for something not wholly known but loosely conceptualized, an “indwelling in the encompassing mystery” of being.⁴⁵⁷

As Cain writes of Marcel, hope is a way of defying “the closed, fixed, stifling world of despair.”⁴⁵⁸ Marcus goes on, “Most important, perhaps, hope is always rooted in

453. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 203.

454. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 53.

455. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 53.

456. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 53.

457. Paul Marcus, *In Search of the Spiritual: Gabriel Marcel, Psychoanalysis and the Sacred*, (London, England: Karnac Books, 2013), 59-60, 64; Robet E. Wood, “The Dialogical Principle and the

‘availability’ (‘disponibilité’⁴⁵⁹), a dynamic, sensitive receptivity and ‘communion,’ ‘the self’s participation in being, or being-with’, that is, with a deeper and wider capacity for loving.⁴⁶⁰ For Marcel, hope was not a solitary activity (Weingarten will reinforce the same in the next chapter, noting that hope is “relational”⁴⁶¹). Rather, hope *becomes* in communion between persons, I and the Other, in which both participate and become actualized. As such, hope becomes a relational product, looking to a future and transcending good.

In terms of trauma recovery, Marcel’s work has real resonance. Hope emerges from situations of “privation, exile, or captivity.”⁴⁶² He writes, “The truth is that there can strictly speaking be no hope except when the temptation to despair exists.”⁴⁶³ In times of trial, then, our hope is “directed towards salvation.”⁴⁶⁴ Marcel goes on, “...the soul always turns towards a hope it does not yet perceive, a light yet to be born, in hope of being delivered from its present darkness....”⁴⁶⁵ For him, hope is not a possibility that

458. Seymour Cain, *Gabriel Marcel’s Theory of Religious Experience* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1995), 175.

459. “‘Disponibility’ is the presupposition of hope—disponibility that begins in finite communion and is consummated in the total openness that turns the soul to a source beyond the visible world.” Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 84.

460. Paul Marcus, *In Search of the Spiritual: Gabriel Marcel, Psychoanalysis and the Sacred*, (London, England: Karnac Books, 2013), 43.

461. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 203.

462. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 60.

463. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 36.

464. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 30.

465. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 31. Marcel used the light/darkness metaphor to demonstrate the import of hope. I have retained it here because it is important to his work while acknowledging that it is problematic for modern readers in that it codes darkness as bad and light as good.

may obtain unless it is born of distress. This rhymes with O'Connor's "inexplicable hope," hope that is only hope *because* it has countenanced evil.⁴⁶⁶

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Marcel's metaphysic of hope is the claim that, "Hope is a mystery and not a problem."⁴⁶⁷ The call of the Christian life is an invitation to both apophatic and kataphatic living, being present and open to both unknowing and knowing, the unspoken and the spoken. Yet because hope is equated here with mystery, and because hope is one of the most significant losses of trauma, hope must be retrieved and co-created. It is through this proximity to death and life—and life to the full—may be found. Hope is the bridge tethered between death and life that provides a way between the two.

Death

The second and/and aporia in our post-traumatic theology is that of death and life. For Rambo, the place of trauma is the place of death, the space where "the world is gone."⁴⁶⁸ If hope is the bridge between death and life, how might a trauma survivor view death through the lens of trauma? Keller proposes a world in which all endings open into new beginnings. This ending (meaning every ending) is only *an* end, not *the* end.⁴⁶⁹ Ours is a world in which God is permitted to grieve the traumatic death of God's child, wherein "[t]he divine and the world form the conditions of each others' becomings."⁴⁷⁰ For Keller, this is an eschatological move. I contend we may make

466. O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 57.

467. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 35.

468. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21

469. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 226. Keller terms this a "chaosmic eschatology."

Christological inferences here, too. I suggest by centering the experience of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we may find an exemplar of life in death. But what of trauma, in some sense an anti-becoming? Is there space for becoming here, too?

Perhaps no story in the biblical text is so representational of Jesus' commitment to the world as his experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane is the story of leaning into the brokenness of the world and abiding in the presence of God even so. Keller writes, "To love is to bear with the chaos."⁴⁷¹ The tale in the garden is the ultimate example of enduring not because one must, but because one chooses to reconcile the love one has for the world with its ultimate chaos. Let us hear from Matthew's Gospel:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."⁴⁷²

Hall writes that Gethsemane is "the cross before the cross."⁴⁷³ The garden is the ultimate test of Jesus' humanity: the choice of whether to be fully alive to God even unto death. The last story-changing decision of Jesus is whether to be fully part of the world by walking the way of pain or seeking to escape the fate awaiting him. It is a choice

470. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 227.

471. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 29.

472. Mt 26:36-41; cf. Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46; Jn 18:1.

473. Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress), 39.

between allowing himself to be so stirred by the Divine-human dance as to move toward the world's deep brokenness or to walk away in self-protective suppression of the divine with-ness.

Though for some readers Jesus' emotions are too much displayed in this experience, his grief and fear make sense, both within his historical context and within our own.⁴⁷⁴ Rolheiser calls Jesus' garden experience a "liminal space," where the depth and breadth of his fear and grief were displayed.⁴⁷⁵ Rolheiser goes on, "We are born alone, without possessing anything... When we exit the planet, we will be like that again, alone and naked. But it's precisely that nakedness, helplessness, and vulnerability that makes for liminal space, space within which God can give us something new, beyond what we already have."⁴⁷⁶ Hall writes that the Christ event is a being-toward-death.⁴⁷⁷ In my view, Being-in-the-world and Being-toward-death converge in Jesus' garden experience, which is what makes it a liminal experience. In Being-in-the-world, one notes the communal and projective natures of life. In Being-toward-death, one cannot properly understand one's existential choices unless one contemplates one's own not-being. In the Garden, Jesus must become acutely aware of his life and his place in the community, as well as project what it would be like for the community if he were not there. He must also

474. "Jesus' excessive display of *pathos* in Gethsemane raised significant questions about his self-understanding, his motivations and, according to some ancient readers, even his masculinity." See the rest of this article to help situate Jesus' emotional display in its historical context. Angela Kim Harkins, "Ritualizing Jesus' Grief at Gethsemane," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 41, no. 2 (December 2018): 177–203.

475. Ronald Rolheiser, "Gethsemane as Liminal Space," *Catholic New Times*, Mar 06, 2005, 8.

476. Rolheiser, "Gethsemane as Liminal Space," 8.

477. Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 38.

see his choice to submit to what is to come in light of being cast into “nothingness,” which Apostolidou writes, “is perceived as the very space in which the possibility of being is constantly generated.”⁴⁷⁸

Indeed, Jesus is experiencing world disclosure in both senses in the Garden.

World disclosure refers, with deliberate ambiguity, to a process which actually occurs at two different levels. At one level, it refers to the disclosure of an already interpreted, symbolically structured world; the world, that is, within which we always already find ourselves. At another level, it refers as much to the disclosure of new horizons of meaning as to the disclosure of previously hidden or unthematized dimensions of meaning.⁴⁷⁹

Notice how this idea rhymes with trauma and trauma recovery: the symbolic world, the world of meaning one has created, “is gone” post-trauma.⁴⁸⁰ Apocalypse has come, the “rough beast” stirred from stony sleep at last. Yet the gift of apocalypse is precisely that it uncovers, it discloses.⁴⁸¹ Keller writes,

The apocalyptic imaginary provides... an idiom spectacular enough to bring to the surface the totalizing threat which lurks just beneath mass consciousness. In post-modern parlance, it presents “the unrepresentable.” But at the same time, it promises to resolve it. If only one accepts the premise of its metanarrative, apocalypse transforms the object of fear into the site of hope.⁴⁸²

478. Apostolidou, “Heidegger’s Being-in-the-World and Its Relation to Tao Te Ching,” 50.

479. Nikolas Kompridis, “On World Disclosure: Heidegger, Habermas and Dewey,” Thesis Eleven 1994: 37 29-45.

480. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21.

481. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v., “Apocalypse,” accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/apocalypse>. The definition of apocalypse as offered by the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project is as follows: “An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, in so far as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9, as cited in Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 240.

482. Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Then and Now: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 6.

A decade later, Keller continues to think about these endings and beginnings, writing, “In other words, we may break apocalyptic closure into dis/closure (the meaning of *apo-kalypsis*, after all) along the same diagonal that cracks open the im/possible. Hope here remains clouded, not canceled, by tragic knowledge and manifold uncertainty.”⁴⁸³

How true of trauma.

Returning to Heidegger, then, the idea of *alētheia* as uncovering or unconcealing has three primary implications: the world as a whole can be unhidden, not just the entities within it; truth is “primarily a function of reality,” and “Truth explicitly presupposes concealment or hiddenness.”⁴⁸⁴ Notice how that which is uncovered is not necessarily reliable in the sense of being true. The same is true of trauma. The “truths” trauma teaches are protective in nature, drawing the person into greater isolation, denying the reality of Being-with. But the same trauma can, if we allow it, make way for the apocalypse to disclose or unconceal an invitation to a deeper life.

Heidegger’s sense of *alētheia* has about it a mythic sense. Caputo argues for “delimit[ing] the *mythos*” of *alētheia*, for “*alētheia* is not a story but a structure, not a moment in time but a structure constitutive *of* time, which has to do with the essential oblivion or withdrawal of Being.”⁴⁸⁵ The trouble with this idea, of course, is that humans are meaning-making creatures. When the brain cannot receive the “truth” of a lived story (e.g., “A grownup hurt me and that was their fault” instead of “This bad thing happened

483. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 311-312.

484. M. J. Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* in The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 1999), 13. For Heidegger, “untruth” is not mere falsity, but rather “disguisedness of the truth.” Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 14.

485. John D. Caputo, “Demythologizing Heidegger: “Alētheia” and the History of being.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 41, no. 3 (1988): 519-520.

to me because I am bad”), or if the story seems to have no basis in truth (i.e., there is no known story to which attribute the event), the brain will simply write one. This is why so often trauma survivors believe something negative about themselves as a result of trauma. Common negative cognitions one hears in trauma therapy include, “I’m worthless, I’m broken, it’s my fault, I should have known better, I am helpless, I have to be perfect.”

For Heidegger, truth as unveiling is an experiential phenomenon—something that cannot be captured in propositional statements, but can be communicated through the use of *mythos*. A severely reductionistic argument such as Caputo’s means one loses something fundamental to the meaning of *alētheia*, which is to say, there must be some sense of parity between the events themselves and the storying around the events. In short, the means of communication needs to match the content of that communication. This is one reason trauma therapies often center the body: its lived experience has much to “say,” much to tell the client and the therapist alike (more on that in the following chapter).

One disclosure of the Garden of Gethsemane is that Jesus modeled not overcoming one’s fear, but facing one’s fear. In the Lucan tale of the Garden, when Jesus finds his friends sleeping instead of watching and praying as he had requested, a heavenly messenger comes to strengthen and enable him to pray again for God’s will to be done.⁴⁸⁶ At just the right moment, the story contends, God broke into the world to enable Jesus to be fully alive to the world, alive to its pain and promise. Jesus’s ordeal in the Garden was so indescribably agonizing that his sweat was like drops of blood, yet he did not succumb

486. Lk 22:39-46.

to fear. While his human friends failed him, the God of becoming was present with Jesus through the messenger God sent to strengthen him for the task ahead. Diane Langberg writes, “Fellowship means communion; intimate familiarity. What a strange idea to seek familiarity with suffering.... I, like Peter, James, and John, have been asked to enter Gethsemane and watch with him... To watch with Christ is to pierce the appearance and get at what truly is.”⁴⁸⁷ Notice how Langberg’s idea of piercing appearances lines up with an aporetic opening, an unconcealing.

Read through a trauma lens, Jesus’ ordeal in the garden presents an opportunity for becoming. Ultimately alone, even in the company of others (at least in the Heideggerian sense of Being-with [*Mitsein*])⁴⁸⁸), Jesus faces the fear of death. We know, of course, that he does die. Yet in the Christian imagination, Jesus is resurrected some three days later. Jesus as the prosopon is most often styled through the lens of the *Logos*.⁴⁸⁹ In a very real sense, however, Jesus’ trial in the garden was for us a prosopon of the divine *pathos*. Jesus serves to reveal a very human response of unbelievable agony, and God is silent. Read through a process lens, God’s silence should not be taken as inaction or uncaring. The apophatic expectation is that God is moved by Jesus’ suffering and suffers, too. God reveals Godself through Jesus’ grief, and Jesus reveals the Divine pathos in the text; this is the God’s self-disclosive act portrayed in the silence of the text. What of God may be revealed in this text?

487. Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 62.

488. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 156.

489. This, due to Theodore. See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (451) (2nd revised ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1975 [1965]), 432.

Peter Abelard contended God's governing characteristic is lovingkindness.⁴⁹⁰ Jesus revealed that lovingkindness so completely and so well that the Divine shone through him, and perhaps nowhere is that more fully revealed than the story of Gethsemane. In this garden, Jesus makes the decision to see his love of the world and its inhabitants to its end. The end of that love was death, not because God needed Jesus to pay humanity's debt or satisfy the devil, but because Jesus chose to show humanity that fear need not hinder one's love for God, as expressed in committed action *toward* God and the world. Jesus chose to be fully alive to fear rather than succumb to it, resulting in "true liberty for the sons of God, so that we may complete all things by his love rather than by fear."⁴⁹¹

In this way, Jesus may serve as an exemplar for trauma recovery. Trauma creates neural networks primed to notice fearful stimuli, ready to save the individual from whatever threatens harm. Yet because the brain does not discriminate between true and false threats very well (trauma triggers can be false witnesses, after all), there must come, at some point, a decision to come to the garden as Jesus does and contend with the worst of life's fears.

Immediately preceding the story of the Garden of Gethsemane in the Synoptic Gospels is the story of Jesus sharing a meal with his friends.⁴⁹² It is on this text the Christian concept of communion is founded, and it is, I contend, what gave Jesus the

490. Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Steven R. Cartwright, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 278.

491. Abelard, *Commentary on Romans*, 48.

492. Mt 26:17–29; Mk 14:12–25; Lk 22:7–3

strength to endure that garden experience. It is to the idea of communion-as-becoming we turn now.

Life

The and/and aporia of doubt and hope offers a theology and anthropology, respectively, of life, of becoming-in-relationship. What is the access point for this becoming? In other words, where is the Holy present, and how might God's presence affect communal becoming? I suggest that, in a broadly Christian post-traumatic spirituality, one may perceive God most fully at the communion table.⁴⁹³ The church is uniquely positioned to bring becoming to bear, not in the unseen future, but in the co-creative act with God on the very earth on which we are placed. It is not only in *witnessing* that we come through trauma healing, but also through *participation*. Nowhere in Christian practice is the witnessing-participative nature of the faith so evident as at the communion table.

There is no doubt that choosing to center the table in the and/and aporia of death and life is controversial for a work of theology focused on trauma recovery. Some would rightly note that Christianity's focus on the Eucharist is potentially re-traumatizing for trauma survivors. To name but a few reasons for this, it re-enacts a violent and undeserved death each time it is "celebrated," it is often accompanied by a corporate confession conflating prioritizing oneself with sin, it often requires a spoken forgiveness toward those who have wronged us (whether or not we are ready to forgive), and physical

493. It should be noted that there are some Christian sects that do not practice the sacrament of communion. The Salvation Army, for example, recognizes no sacraments, because they believe they are not necessary for salvation. Likewise, Quakers do not practice communion because they believe all of life is sacramental, and no particular ritual is necessary to get in touch with God.

touch is often extended to and expected of those who partake.⁴⁹⁴ I take seriously those criticisms of the Christian tradition in general and my work centering the Eucharist as death-cum-life in particular. Yet I cannot help but remember the old maxim, “You gotta dance with the one who brung ya.” That is to say, the idea that death-dealing event was not wholly successful is the *topos* from which the Christian faith springs. It is also here that one may find an aporetic opening to life.

Mount Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson write of the racialized problems of eucharist in most American churches, some of which scan clearly as problems of trauma broadly: our practice assumes a shared story where none exists and the marginalized are trivialized, and the eucharist is *consumed*, but not *experienced*. To the former, they write,

Yet when real bodies gather at the Table there is a thoroughgoing dissonance that signals rupture and betrayal as well as particularity and possibility. Estranged relationships are allowed to splinter—and instead of all nations and tongues at the Table, we look around and see people just like us. And we quietly partake of this feast we’re told reflects God’s hopes for us while trivialized souls are left thirsty and hungry.⁴⁹⁵

Or, put differently, “What bodies actually gather around the Table coupled with the sacramental rhetoric of reconciliation and redemption reveals a dis-membered Body of Christ that we struggle to acknowledge.”⁴⁹⁶ To the latter, they write that in the eucharistic

494. See Marcus Pound, “Eucharist and Trauma,” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1014 (2007): 187-194; Karen O’Donnell, in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, ed. Meg Warner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); Hilary Jerome Scarsella, Rhoda Keener, Eleanor Krieder, David B. Miller, & John Rempel, “The Lord’s Supper: A Ritual or Harm of Healing?,” 2016, accessed January 11, 2021, https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/08/Leader_Summer2016_WorshipResources.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2XHP3-xh2HonpuFI4uoMv5C3STHxlvJvVz5E5gtJDVbZUKRBDhfk The final resource from the Mennonite church includes theological grounding for this trauma as well as practical means of mitigating potential harm at the table.

495. Marcia Mount Shoop & Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” *Theology Today* 70, no. 2, (2013): 145.

496. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 151.

meal, the marginalized are often left merely to “nibble at the bread of life and sip the cup of salvation.”⁴⁹⁷ Instead of having experienced the communal remembering Jesus seems to have desired for us, this leaves survivors feeling as though they have missed something critical of the Christian life.

The story of the table is one critical to the Christian faith. How, then, might we reconcile traumatic experience and Christian remembering? We begin by remembering Tillich’s notion that “a symbol participates in the reality it symbolizes.”⁴⁹⁸ Or, put another way, “Symbols are figurative expressions of a non-figurative reality.”⁴⁹⁹ For Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson, the reconciliation comes in “re-membering” the body of Christ. That is to say, “Re-membering is an embodied dynamic. We come to Eucharist to remember our story and re-member the Body of Christ in the communal act sharing, proclaiming, ingesting bread and wine, and leaning on the mystery of God’s transformative power to redeem and repair that which is most broken about us. Such communal memory and re-membering has the power to form and transform us.”⁵⁰⁰

Stone suggests “communal practices such as sacraments may provide an important path (a set of counter-performances, if you will) for restoring the capacity of bodily reconnecting to that world.”⁵⁰¹ The Christian community’s identity is founded

497. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 145.

498. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 169.

499. Douglas Hedley, “Tillich and Participation,” in *Returning to Tillich: Theology and Legacy in Transition*, eds. Russell Re Manning & Samuel Andrew Shearn (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, Inc., 2017), 37.

500. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 152.

501. Bryan Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” in *Post-Traumatic Public Theology*, eds. Stephanie N. Arel & Shelly Rambo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 53.

upon a trauma, but it should be noted that the communion ritual predates that trauma, for Jesus' supper with his friends comes before the Garden of Gethsemane, arrest, trial, assault, and killing the next day. Stone goes on,

However, rethinking Christian witness in light of trauma and a more expansive understanding of redemption can help us imagine Eucharistic practice as enacting an ongoing participation in the brokenness of Christ's body that does not merely perpetuate more broken bodies (and psyches) but that gestures toward a love that remains and heals by helping sufferers imagine a life ahead without suggesting they simply make a "clean break from the past."⁵⁰²

For Rambo,⁵⁰³ traumatology is "the study of what remains." Here, Stone suggests that what remains in the practice of the Eucharist is not only the brokenness of the body of Jesus, not only the relationships briefly severed by his death, but a love that holds fast and perseveres. Moreover, what remains *heals* for Stone, because the ritual itself opens up toward the future while refusing to deny or elide the past. Augustine describes the import of the communal act thusly:

For what you see is simply bread and a cup - this is the information your eyes report. But your faith demands far subtler insight: the bread is Christ's body, the cup is Christ's blood.... My friends, these realities are called sacraments because in them one thing is seen, while another is grasped. What is seen is a mere physical likeness; what is grasped bears spiritual fruit. So now, if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle Paul speaking to the faithful: "You are the body of Christ, member for member." [1 Cor. 12.27] If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table!⁵⁰⁴

Of *The Didache*, one of the earliest extant documents on the Eucharist, Dirk Lange writes that rather than the cross, it mentions sharing of the bread and wine. That

502. Stone, "Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist," 53.

503. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 15.

504. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272, accessed November 21, 2020, http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine_sermon_272_eucharist.htm

meal “disrupts our remembering.”⁵⁰⁵ Stone notes that it is the sharing of the meal that *disorients* and *reorients* the meal. He writes, “Remembering the Christ event, not through the violence of the cross but through the sharing of bread and wine, serves as a departure from traumatic reenactment and brings new possibilities for healing and solidarity.”⁵⁰⁶ Note here how the reenactment centers a time *before* the trauma, recalling for survivors a life and a world that involved (relatively) safe community and inviting them to participate in remembering such.

How might that happen? Stone goes on to state that, in the Wesleyan tradition,

The celebration of the Eucharist here is less a cognitive remembrance of some past event and more a performance of our relationship to and reception of Christ’s presence as grace. Our reception is not a complacent or passive voyeurism that looks on ‘knowingly,’ but a bodily participation in Christ (both in the sense of the involvement of our material bodies and the enactment of a new social body). Christ’s presence in the meal is in some respects an absence—a presence that cannot be grasped or fully known, contained, or managed.⁵⁰⁷

For Stone, then, as we participate in the meal, we become, as Augustine above wrote, “the body of Christ.” In the co-occurring apophasis and kataphasis of the Divine presence, mystery is embodied anew in us. As we touch, taste, and feel the reality of God into being, we are transformed into the very thing we seek to emulate. In a very real sense, “the church does not simply perform the Eucharist; the Eucharist performs the church.”⁵⁰⁸ Likewise, for Tillich, it is communion that makes us truly human. He notes, “Therefore, there is no person without an encounter with other persons. Persons can grow

505. Dirk Lange, *Trauma Recalled: Liturgy, Disruption, and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 9

506. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 54.

507. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 54.

508. William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 225.

only in the communion of personal encounter. Individualization and participation are interdependent on all levels of being.”⁵⁰⁹

An ecclesiology centered around the communion is the foundation for my own tradition, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It was within those walls I learned to orient my life around the table. While traditions vary widely in their celebratory methods and timings, in the Christian Church, we gather at the table weekly. Usually placed at the end of the service, the act of communing is the apex of our fellowship, reminding the body of and proclaiming our mutual interdependence before we take our leave one from another. It is a centering experience, this communing, and here the center holds. It is where we join in the suffering and joy of the other. The presence of God, in Christ, through the Spirit, comes to the table. Stone notes, “the reality of Christ’s presence is not in the first place a referential claim about the substance of the bread and wine, but rather a performative claim. In the act of remembering (the *anamnesis*) and the invocation of the Spirit (the *epiclesis*) in the Eucharistic prayer, Christ is ‘made real’ by the Spirit to those who share in the meal.”⁵¹⁰

Let us notice again the aporetic nature of the table, the place where Christ’s presence dwells and un-dwells, a presence we cannot “locate, control, or define… as it heals and restores by disrupting our memories and narratives and opening us up to new realities and possibilities.”⁵¹¹ Rambo writes, “Addressing trauma entails attending to layers of covering and uncovering, appearing and disappearing, surfacing and

509. Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 177.

510. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 54.

511. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 56.

receding.”⁵¹² Notice how, at the table, we ritualize these things, covering and uncovering the elements, the appearance of the Spirit in the soon-to-be disappearance of Jesus, surfacing our wounds in hopes that they will recede in and through a healing community. In trauma recovery, one goal toward healing is to restore language around the event. This is similar to the goal of theology, which is to provide language for the unsayable, which is to say, the transcendent. Much like the trauma recovery, embodied participation in the table means, at least in part, “tell[ing] the truth about ourselves, as impossible as that truth may be.”⁵¹³ Stone notes that, as we come to the table as our most authentic, wounded selves, we are able to witness suffering “without pretending that it is redemptive...or that it can be neatly erased.”⁵¹⁴ In so doing, we may integrate the world of the real and touch the ineffable. At the table, we may truly become the embodied, participating body of Christ, a body “oriented to suffering in gestures of hope.”⁵¹⁵

As Tillich so eloquently writes,

The concept of participation has many functions. A symbol participates in the reality it symbolizes; the knower participates in the known; the lover participates in the beloved; the existent participates in the essences which make it what it is, under the condition of existence; the individual participates in the destiny of separation and guilt; the Christian participates in the New Being as it is manifest in Jesus the Christ.⁵¹⁶

512. Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, loc. 164.

513. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 154.

514. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 57.

515. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 57.

516. Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 177.

This is, after all, the mystery of healing: that broken persons choose to enter into mutually vulnerable relationships. When we “show up” to experience and participate in the act of remembering, it is, as Augustine writes, “our own mystery placed on the Lord’s table.”⁵¹⁷ We place on the table our hope for becoming, trusting in the Holy Mystery to show up, recognizing the wounds we carry with us in the approach. Where we are able to ask, “our most wounded questions...., faith will approximate courage.”⁵¹⁸

Despair, while deeply embedded in the Passion narrative, is yet often obscured by triumphalism and certainty. If we are honestly to enter into the grief of others, we must remember the pain of this death every week as we come to the altar. We must feel in our body (and in our bodies) what it means to grieve along with God the sins of empire and patriarchy, systems that harm and oppress. We must stand against repressing our grief in favor of comfort, for the raw dread of death has no redemptive gloss in trauma. For the trauma survivor, life is often a continual Passion Week that never opens into Eastertide. In some traditions, my own Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tradition included, we often close our communion with the line, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”⁵¹⁹ Communion, Paul says, is mute testimony, a proclamation that life is not always what it seems. Eden can be snatched away in an instant, true enough. But there are ways to remember life persists beyond the grave; one move toward resurrection life is enacted each week at the table. Rambo’s words in *Resurrection Wounds* seem particularly appropriate here: “Resurrection appears

517. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272.

518. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 140.

519. 1 Cor 11:26.

as an invitation to weave a new kind of body, less pure, pristine, and perfected than the resurrected body often presented in the tradition. It appears as an invitation to multilayered witness, involving senses beyond seeing..."⁵²⁰ In this space, we recognize our being resurrected though re-membering. Having been met by God and the Other, we have begun to live more fully. We may carry the gift of that meeting, too, outside the church's walls and into the world-at-large. As Buber put it, "All real living is meeting."⁵²¹ We may notice our opportunities for meeting more fully having been nourished in our own becoming. I am reminded of John Shea's beautiful poem on meeting-as-communion:

A Prayer of Communion

On a day
that would not become day,
when fog made the sun a memory
and the unceasing night rain
gave morning a midnight mood,
the car took the forest preserve drive
to become one
with the gray, wet world of woods.

It was already inhabited.
By the side of the road, mounted on a motionless horse
she waited
the fog hugging her,
the rain braiding her hair,
her jeans and shirt
dripping the low sky.
She blurred and focused
with the swish of the wipers.
as the car splashed past,
her soulful eyes
moved beyond the locked doors

520. Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, loc. 343.

521. Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

into the dry interior of the driver.
The rearview mirror caught the fog and forest
carrying her away.

Now on days
that will not become day,
she waits
in the downpour of memory,
about to dissolve into earth and sky
but bearing for the moment
the marks of communion.⁵²²

In the meeting of holy communion, which is to say, truly encountering both God and another human being such that their life touches yours, all are changed. We are reminded of the life each one carries within, whether it is locked away as a forbidden and dangerous thing or lived into more fully. Something in us stirs when life is asserted. In that space, living and meeting become our communion. In that space, our communion can mark the beginnings of salvation.

Fear

The third and/or aporia of post-traumatic spirituality is that of fear and courage. Because of how trauma impacts a survivor's nervous system, fear is a near-constant companion. Attendant to such is the deep hope for a savior, for someone strong and capable to do the survivor's work for them. The desire is for someone to *σώζω* (*sozo*), "to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction."⁵²³ Of over 100 appearances in the New Testament, the majority of references to *σώζω* indicate physical healing, being made well in the physical body. In many cases, this healing comes through

522. John Shea, *The God Who Fell from Heaven* (Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1979), 40.

523. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*. Updated ed. La Habra: Lockman Foundation, 1995. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>.

Jesus' touch of a sick person, and in the story of the hemorrhaging woman, it happens through merely touching Jesus' garment.⁵²⁴

After Jesus' death, the community that followed him expected him to return soon to continue this healing work, that is, to usher in the reign of God in the Parousia (Greek παρουσία, coming or advent).⁵²⁵ Taylor notes, "It is undoubtedly true that the original witnesses to Jesus' ministry had expected Jesus to return during their lifetime, and that they would all have been dead by the last quarter of the first century CE."⁵²⁶ This, of course, did not happen. The Synoptic Gospels were written roughly around the time Taylor mentions. Of the Synoptics, only Matthew uses the word Parousia. Mentions of the return of the Christ figure are present in all three in some way, evincing an "imminent, yet indeterminate hope in the return of Jesus."⁵²⁷ When the waiting gave way to questioning, the early followers of The Way needed either to abandon their hope or reinterpret their belief in a way that made "those beliefs and expectations tenable."⁵²⁸ Their solution was to position both "...the parousia and the resurrection as already realised in the life of the Christian community."⁵²⁹

524. Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-35; Lk 8:43-48.

525. *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon*, Updated ed. s.v. παρουσία, (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/parousia.html>

526. Nicholas H. Taylor, "Early Christian Expectations Concerning the Return of Jesus: From Imminent Parousia to the Millennium," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 104 (07, 1999): 36.

527. Taylor, "Early Christian Expectations," 35. Some examples of the idea of the Second Coming in the Gospels include: Mt 16:27, 24:27-30, 24:42-44, 26:64; Mk 8:38; Lk 17:28-30, 21:25-28; Jn 14:3. Hiers, on the other hand, makes the case that by the time the Gospel of Luke was written, the author realized the Parousia was not coming soon and therefore positioned some verses of the book in such a way that it would not appear Jesus was soon to return. See Richard H. Hiers, "The Problem of the Delay of the Parousia in Luke-Acts," *New Testament Studies* 20, no. 2 (1974): 145-155.

528. Taylor, "Early Christian Expectations," 42.

Since the early church was poised for an ending that did not come in the generations immediately following the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the faith's understanding of being saved from the present world shifted out of necessity. The Parousia was moved from a position of immediacy to one of futurity. By the eleventh century, the Nicene Creed located in the future what the First Council of Nicaea had made present. The First Council's creed read he, "cometh to judge the living and the dead."⁵³⁰ Note the third person singular present indicative of "come."⁵³¹ The final version of the Nicene Creed reads, "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end," using the future indicative.⁵³²

Awaiting a σωτήρ (*soter*), a savior or deliverer has long been Christian theology's future answer to an unendurable present, but that salvation became something to await after this life rather than within it. Salvation through the second coming of Jesus is not coming in the present if twenty centuries of waiting have taught us anything. Yet for trauma survivors, there is the desire to experience the strong arm of protection of a deliverer. How, then, are we to be saved?

In trauma recovery, salvation must be grounded in interpersonal experience—in the life the author of Luke-Acts says we have *now*—that in which we live and are moved

529. Taylor, "Early Christian Expectations," 41.

530. First Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, para. 5, accessed January 19, 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11044a.htm>

531. *Yourdictionary.com*, s.v., "Cometh," accessed January 19, 2021, <http://www.yourdictionary.com/cometh>

532. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "What We Believe," accessed January 22, 2021, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe>

and *are* (more on that in the next section). This hope must involve the physical body, must happen in real time, must be heard (even—especially—to its own speech⁵³³), and must open into deeper becoming. One problem with the image of a σωτήρ, of course, is that this salvation comes from outside oneself. Jantzen notes, “...the people who need to be saved cannot normally save themselves... Salvation implies dependance.” She contrasts the notion of salvation with that of flourishing, which comes from “an inner dynamic of growth, with no need of interference from the outside.” Lest she be misunderstood to be writing of hyper-individualism, Jantzen goes on, “Although such flourishing of course draws upon external sources...and is part of the web of connection with others..., this sort of continuing interdependence within the course of life is of an utterly different kind than the desperate dependence of someone in crisis on an external saviour or rescuer.”⁵³⁴

The biblical text reminds Christian believers that Jesus modeled a way of being that brings the empire of God to bear on the world in which, and the persons with whom, we live. Irenaeus wrote that salvation means a new creation for all things.⁵³⁵ In our waiting, we are creating, or at least invited to create the world in which we want to live. For Bultmann, the only true interpretation of the last things must be a real experience of human life, not something that exists outside the bounds of time and space.⁵³⁶ Salvation,

533. Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 128.

534. Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine, Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 160.

535. “The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth...” Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V:33:3.

then, cannot be relegated to an uncertain future. Salvation that is really salvation, I contend, has an eschatological character. Keller writes that a “*nova creatio ex profundis*,” a new creation from the depths, “requires our entire participation.”⁵³⁷ All of these things rhyme well with Jantzen’s focus on flourishing. She reminds readers that both salvation and flourishing are metaphors; “In both cases the words must be understood as depicting not a literal situation, but rather ways that have been developed by theologians and philosophers of understanding humanity in relation to God and the world.”⁵³⁸ Merely waiting for a savior will not help trauma survivors begin becoming again, but waiting in hope may prod all of us to make the community of God real and true “on earth as it is in heaven.”

The σώζω of a σωτήρ, because it situates saving as something someone does *for us*, rather than *with us*, is insufficient for healing-toward-becoming. How, then, might we understand salvation as it relates to trauma recovery? I suggest, in line with Eastern soteriology, θεραπεύω (therapeuō) serves as a helpful corrective toward healing.⁵³⁹ Θεραπεύω appears 43 times in that form (and some 75 more in other forms) in the New Testament. Strong’s defines θεραπεύω as, “I care for, attend, serve, treat, especially of a physician; hence: I heal.”⁵⁴⁰ Notice that, by definition, θεραπεύω is an interpersonal

536. Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 4, *The Gifford Lectures*, <https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/history-and-eschatology/x-christian-faith-and-history>.

537. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 238. On this thought, she notes, “the *creatio ex nihilo* is to the counternarrative of *creatio ex profundis* as the supernatural New Creation is to the counterapocalyptic *nova creatio ex profundis*.”

538. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 160.

539. For a primer on the idea of salvation as therapy in Eastern Orthodoxy, see Vigen Guroian, *The Melody of Faith: Theology in an Orthodox Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 43-64.

practice and means of healing. It comes through one individual to another. To attend to a person in a caring manner is the essence of θεραπεύω.

Am I suggesting, then, that therapy (a clear cognate of θεραπεύω) is the means to trauma recovery? Yes and no. Certainly, as a licensed mental health professional, I believe therapy is helpful and most often necessary for trauma survivors to reintegrate time, body, and word toward becoming. But I am more interested in a metonymic understanding of θεραπεία. Thayer's notes that θεραπεία may be understood to mean a household, attendants, even servants. How like the example of Jesus it is to serve one another in community. One aim of soteriology, then, may be the formation of a community of persons able to live courageously in the face of fear, to counter the oppressive structures of empire, to stand against being made afraid for someone else's benefit. To this end, Bader-Saye notes, "...we tend to lack courage just to the extent that we lack community. As a community we can often bear risks together that we might be reticent to face alone. So if we are to recover courageous living, we need to recover the kind of community capable of supporting it."⁵⁴¹

And while Jantzen draws distinction between the images of salvation and flourishing, I suggest an aporetic approach may be helpful here, too. I agree with her that a traditional soteriology of Jesus as Savior is appreciably linked to individualism, patriarchy, and the imagery of death. Further, I agree the metaphor of flourishing better emphasizes the deep interconnectedness of human life.⁵⁴² Yet I believe, too, in what John

540. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible*, Updated ed. s.v. θεραπεύω (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995). <http://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>.

541. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 54.

Hick calls “the universal salvific will of God.”⁵⁴³ In this aporia, *God* saves, while Christian faith offers both salvific possibilities and flourishing opportunities. To use Hick’s terminology, this would entail a shift toward “Reality centeredness,” wherein devotion to the “Real” produces compassion and love toward all of life.⁵⁴⁴ Read through a Levinasian lens, the face of the other helps resituate human approaches to the transcendent “back within human experience.”⁵⁴⁵ Kearney writes, “The message is this: the divine, as exile, is in each human other who asks to be received into our midst. The face that serves as trace of transcendent divinity is also a portal to humanity in its flesh and blood immanence.”⁵⁴⁶ This opening, in turn, offers new possibilities for soteriology, such that each person acts to bring about messianic peace. For Levinas, this means “each person acts as if though [s]he were the messiah,” bearing responsibility *to* the other to end the suffering *of* the other.⁵⁴⁷ The suffering other is “the trace of God.”⁵⁴⁸ If each person in a healing community acted as though they were anointed to ease the suffering of the other, a community may truly be called salvific. When fear is met with the salvific power of community, courage swells within, among, and around its participants.

542. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 162-165.

543. Gavin D'Costa, “John Hick's Copernican Revolution: Ten Years After,” *New Blackfriars* 65, no. 769/770 (1984): 326.

544. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London, England: MacMillan, 1989), 301-302.

545. Xin Mao, “Transformation from Real-Centredness to Other-Centredness: A Levinasian Re-Appraisal of John Hick's Religious Pluralism,” *Religions* 9, no. 9 (2018): 255.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090255>

546. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 20.

547. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 90.

548. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 65.

Courage

Love of God has nothing moral in and of itself. It merely shows the way. It is the incentive for a more perfect becoming.... God forces us to do nothing except *become*. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is: to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfillment.⁵⁴⁹

Bader-Saye, citing Aristotle writes, “fear arises from the imagination of future evil that is imminent and hard to resist; evil here is defined as the loss of a good that one loves. Hence, fear can be disordered in two basic ways. We can fear *what* we should not... or we can fear *as* we should not...”⁵⁵⁰ Fearing *what* we should not is to be afraid of something immense, but remote. For example, fearing air travel because the plane might crash would be inappropriate in because the fear should be “remote or far off.”⁵⁵¹ For trauma survivors, even the mention of an event like the one they endured, no matter how remote, can trigger deep fear.

Fearing *as* we should not has to do with “the appetitive movement of the soul,” wherein, “fear implies a certain contraction.” That is, fear causes our metaphorical hearts to shrink. This is contrary to the call of the Gospel which is concerned with expanding and calling us, “not to limit ourselves to a few things but to open ourselves charitably and generously to many things.”⁵⁵² Notice how this contraction, this fearing as we should not,

549. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 68. I disagree that God “forces” us to become, preferring the language of an invitation. Further, I do not believe there is any “perfect” becoming. That said, Irigaray brilliantly captures the idea that love is the way toward becoming, and that we must confront that which inhibits that becoming.

550. Scott Bader-Saye, “Thomas Aquinas and the Culture of Fear,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 2 (2005): 101.

551. Bader-Saye, “Thomas Aquinas and the Culture of Fear,” 102.

rhymes with Irigaray's shriveling and death. When the unknown future is too scary to countenance, how might one come to live again? The author of Luke-Acts gives the reader some idea in the seventeenth chapter of Acts:

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'⁵⁵³

The people of Athens are worshipping a God unknown to them. Paul, "never not a Jew,"⁵⁵⁴ offers to explicate the God to whom the altar refers. Yet instead of beginning with the import of Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christian tradition is wont to do, Paul refers the Athenians back to the creation event, the "in the beginning," where the Spirit vibrated over the surface of the deep. Paul recapitulates the creation event in these few verses to illuminate the "unknown God." This is not so different from Irenaeus' statement, "For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God."⁵⁵⁵

552. Bader-Saye, "Thomas Aquinas and the Culture of Fear," 105.

553. Acts 17:22-28, NRSV.

554. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 37.

The Unknown God, the Ἀγνωστος Θεός (*Agnostos Theos*) describes powerfully post-traumatic spirituality. Paul refers to his tradition’s ηγάπη to answer the Ἀγνωστος Θεός, both of which are names for the Holy *and* refusals of names. This God steadfastly refuses naming and full knowing. Kearney writes, “Without non-knowing (*a-gnosis*) there would be no motivating urge to know more, to understand differently, to think otherwise, and therefore no possibility of seeking to re-cognize (*ana-gnorisis*) truth as it begins anew, again and again.”⁵⁵⁶ The definition of agnostic is, “a person who holds the view that any ultimate reality (such as God) is unknown and probably unknowable.”⁵⁵⁷ Indeed. In post-traumatic spirituality, a person who has experienced the unspeakable must settle into the uncertainty of life, even a life of faith. This God is, at least in part, unknown. Yet Paul says in verse 27 even the Unknown God is near.

He goes on, “In [God] we live, and move, and have our being” (“ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν”). The present active indicative tense of the Greek used here for live, ζῶμεν, refers both to the time of the action and the kind of action. We live—right now—in God. And we live—continuously, progressively—in God. The author of Luke-Acts situates living in the present moment, which opens forward. There is no mention of living in the past here, grammatically speaking. The verb ἐσμέν (“are,” often translated “have our being”) is also a present active indicative and has the same sense as ζῶμεν. Yet κινούμεθα (“move”) is a bit of a special case. It, too, is a present indicative, but it is voiced in the passive. Literally, it should be rendered, “we are

555. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV:20:7.

556. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 8.

557. Merriam-Webster, s.v., “Agnostic,” retrieved April 30, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agnostic>

moved.” In God, we live and *are* toward the future. We are moved, too, toward the future. God and the world act upon each of us, yet we live and are becoming. This is the poetry of trauma recovery.

The Unknown God, in whom we live and are moved and *are*, is made known to us through the work of the Spirit. This is the unfolding of healing in our lives, the presence of the One who reads and opens the “gaps and fissures”⁵⁵⁸ of our stories. This forgotten God vibrates and oscillates and moves over, around, and within each one, waiting to be recognized. If resurrection comes with remembering, and remembering by our communal becoming, we may remember the Spirit and so re-member our own stories unto community.⁵⁵⁹ But how do we begin?

We may begin by seeking courage. Brené Brown, contrasting courage and bravery, says, “Courage, the original definition of courage, when it first came into the English language -- it's from the Latin word ‘cor,’ meaning ‘heart’—and the original definition was to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart.”⁵⁶⁰ For trauma survivors, telling the story of who we are with our whole hearts is deeply terrifying and, in some sense, impossible. Remember that one impact of trauma is on narrative memory: the brain cannot fully process the trauma event because it is not stored in the brain in narrative form. Restoration, then, is not something one may accomplish on one’s own.

558. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 31.

559. Too tangential for our discussion, Scott’s chapter on resurrection as being remembered in the Hebrew Scriptures nonetheless bears on my theology here. See Bernard Brandon Scott, *The Trouble with Resurrection: From Paul to the Fourth Gospel* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2010).

560. Brené Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability*, June 2010 [TED talk], https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?language=en

Nevertheless, to begin to heal, trauma survivors must begin to detail what has happened to them in some form.⁵⁶¹

Of course, the construct of courage is not original to the English language. Plato writes extensively of courage in *Laches*, wherein a cast of characters, including Socrates, debate the definition of courage, specifically within the context of military service. One definition given is that courage is “a certain endurance of the soul,” another is “the knowledge of the grounds of hope and fear.” The dialogue ends in aporia when Socrates finds both definitions unsatisfactory.⁵⁶²

Aristotle presents similar ideas about courage in *Nicomachean Ethics*, writing

“Though courage is concerned with feelings of confidence and of fear, it is not concerned with both alike, but more with the things that inspire fear; for he who is undisturbed in face of these and bears himself as he should towards these is more truly brave than the man who does so towards the things that inspire confidence. It is for facing what is painful, then, as has been said, that men are called brave. Hence also courage involves pain, and is justly praised; for it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant.”⁵⁶³

Why act courageously? For Aristotle, the answer is, “for honour’s sake, for this is the end of virtue.” I am reminded of the character of Helen Burns in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Though she is treated cruelly by the staff of Lowood, the orphanage where she and Jane reside, she reminds Jane that she should “endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself.” Jane argues that she could not bear the treatment Helen receives, to

561. Trauma therapy may take many forms. Some treatments involve constructing a trauma narrative (as in TF-CBT), while others require noticing what happens in the body when trauma triggers come up (as in Somatic Experiencing). Still others involve targeting what the event made us believe about ourselves and reprocessing those negative cognitions (as in EMDR). Before any reprocessing takes place, a safe relationship must be established between therapist and trauma survivor.

562. Plato, *Laches*, trans by Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laches.html>

563. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, III:9, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.3.iii.html>

which Helen replies, “Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you *cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear.”⁵⁶⁴ One reads in Helen’s words the idea that endurance is connected to duty and, by extension, virtue. In *Laches*, Plato’s characters come to aporia around courage, in part, because they are unable to differentiate it from any other virtue.

Tillich, too, responds to Aristotle’s view of courage in *The Courage to Be*. He writes, “Courage does what is to be praised and rejects what is to be despised. . . . Courage is the affirmation of one’s essential nature, one’s inner aim or entelechy, but it is an affirmation which has in itself the character of ‘in spite of.’”⁵⁶⁵ He notes the interconnected nature of military service and the aristocracy, which positions courage as a virtue. After the aristocracy died, “courage could be defined as the universal knowledge of what is good and evil,” and “wisdom and courage converged and true courage became distinguished from the soldier’s courage.”⁵⁶⁶ Later, the Stoics would take up the question of how to disambiguate courage and wisdom, followed by Spinoza’s efforts to understand courage and self-affirmation, and, more modernly, Nietzsche’s attempt to engage self-affirmation in light of courage, all of which Tillich briefly surveys before taking up his project about the dual moral and ontological characters of courage.

As Tillich reminds us, the call to courage is not an individual call. Rather, it is “participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation,” a place where our knowing meets God’s knowing.⁵⁶⁷ The Spirit makes an impossible telling possible,

564. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London, England: Random House, 1991), 67.

565. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 4.

566. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 5.

breathes through the unspoken and unsayable, and enables a telling. That telling may include words, of course, but may also involve the telling of bodily responses, trauma triggers, the apophasic horror of silence, and what David James Duncan calls “river teeth,” those fragments of stories can neither be fully expressed nor fully ignored.⁵⁶⁸

To tell the story of who one is with one’s whole heart assumes there is a listener who can hold safely what the survivor has to share. In this moment of real living—that is, meeting—we may glimpse what it means to be fully alive.⁵⁶⁹ In Rambo’s words, we are “to listen for the language of remaining” in that which goes on after the trauma.⁵⁷⁰ Or, perhaps more poetically, the listener must allow “the refined anguish of language [to pass] over him.”⁵⁷¹ We are to listen to what—and who—remains in hopes of restoring a pre-trauma image of the self, and enable a living into a new, post-trauma self.

This is witness, yes, but more than witness, too. For in the human-human interaction, where I and the other meet, the Spirit serves as a faithful beholder. Just like how, for Heidegger, there can be untruth in *alēthia*, so, too, our stories can disguise truth. Tumminio-Hansen writes, “Traumatic memories, therefore, may both be highly accurate as well as unreliable, especially in relation to peripheral details.”⁵⁷² That is, even if we are telling *our* truth, the truth may yet be disguised. How is this? Trauma is so insidious

567. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 22.

568. David James Duncan, *River Teeth: Stories and Writings* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995).

569. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

570. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 31.

571. Mary Oliver, “Toad” in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 273.

572. Tumminio Hansen, “Remembering Rape in Heaven,” 6.

because it tells not only the story of what happened, but also the story of who we are (or, more accurately, who we believe ourselves to be). There is a perception of the self attendant to the trauma event. If I have survived Hurricane Katrina, I might believe I will never be safe, or cannot ever be safe to maintain my self-protection, or both. If I am abandoned by a parent, I might believe it is because I am unlovable. There may simultaneously be truth in the event, and disguisedness of truth in the story I tell myself about that truth, to put it in Heideggerian terms.

To begin to restore the truth of an event and its realted self-story, one must first recognize that there *are* multiple parts to the story. When one is able to separate the event from their identity, the Spirit is given berth. This is the beginning of resurrection. There is a beautiful idea of truth (תְּשֻׁתָּה, *emet*) in biblical Hebrew, that truth is firm and sturdy, that truth is our grounding. “The seal of the Holy One is truth,” says the Genesis Rabbah.⁵⁷³ If truth is our grounding in God, and the Spirit’s task is to help us uncover what is true about ourselves through another, She must do so through the same gaps and fissures we bring into our storytelling. When what we have carried as “truth” is witnessed by another and revealed instead to be warped or even groundless, we begin to find freedom from our trauma.

Second Corinthians 3:17-18 says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” As the

573. Genesis Rabbah LXXXI, https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit_Rabbah.81?lang=bi

Spirit “dances and vibrates”⁵⁷⁴ between us and a trusted other, when the lies of trauma give way to truer truths, we begin to see the glory of God, which, as Irenaeus says, is a human being fully alive. This is the gift and work of the Spirit. This is what it means to walk the rugged path toward change. This is what it means to continue becoming after trauma. In the and/ands of life and death, doubt and hope, and fear and courage, we may behold God and become, once more, fully alive.

Becoming fully alive is lovely in theory and challenging in practice. Because theology traffics in ultimacy, it has lived consequences for real human beings. It is important, therefore, that any ideas one has about God and the world be practicable in ways that bring healing rather than harm. We turn now to what becoming may look like in the therapeutic relationship, followed by how it might look in the pastoral relationship.

574. “We must not view the trinitarian perichoresis as a rigid pattern. We should see it as at once the most intense excitement and the absolute rest of the love which is the wellspring of everything that lives, the keynote of all resonances, and the source of the rhythmically dancing and vibrating worlds.” Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 16.

Becoming in the Therapeutic Relationship

Therapists become therapists because we want to help people heal. I came to specialize in trauma work because of my own encounters in therapy with clinicians who helped me not only deal with my pain but also heal from it. (That is not to say I believe I am fully healed, of course.) Working with highly traumatized clients is a great gift and a real challenge. Often as clinicians, no matter how deep our training, we feel ill-equipped to help the persons entrusted into our care. Therapist missteps can be devastating in trauma work and require deftness and skill to repair. The joy of watching a client alongside whom you have walked heal and become is unmatched. But of course, if you are a trauma therapist, you know that already.

Working with trauma in a way that leads to becoming is, first and foremost, about the relationship. Healers who do have not done their own deep work are at risk of harming already traumatized clients. The process of therapist becoming is, by definition, ongoing and should be taken seriously. In the busyness of our lives, we can become so wrapped up in doing our jobs well that we neglect self-growth which, in turn, leads to doing our jobs poorly. How might clinicians engage with the aporetic and/ands of post-traumatic spirituality in ways that lead to client becoming?

First, clinicians should remember that our job is to superpose, not superimpose, our views with clients. Superposing is simply seeking to open a tiny space of doubt in the hardened certainty of trauma survivorship. It allows the therapist to help the survivor imagine a different way of being (and becoming), even if they are not ready to move toward that becoming just yet. Superposing does not require the client to give up their perspective, it simply invites the survivor and therapist to co-create an imaginal world,

and then help usher that world into being when the client is ready. In the three and/ands of aporia—doubt and hope, fear and courage, death and life—the client, clinician, and Holy One invite one another’s becoming. For both this and the following chapter, I have grouped the aporias together, for each must contain the other. Nowhere is this more evident than with the concept of reasonable hope.

Doubt and Hope

One clinical construct critical to survivor flourishing is reasonable hope. Kaethe Weingarten sought to operationalize hope, lending clinical utility to what had previously been the purview of philosophy and religion. Weingarten writes,

There are five characteristics of reasonable hope, which, taken singly or together, illustrate the construct. These characteristics are drawn from a number of domains, including writing on hope. They are that reasonable hope: is relational; consists of a practice; maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable; seeks goals and pathways to them; and accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair.⁵⁷⁵

It should be noted that trauma impacts the whole individual who experiences it: both the psychic and embodied parts of the whole. That said, I find it helpful to delineate the ways the construct of reasonable hope may be broken down into the previously mentioned categories of time, body, word, and becoming. For this reason I have changed the order of Weingarten’s characteristics, which you will see below.

Time

The antidote to disruption of time in trauma is most clearly answered in Weingarten’s third aspect of reasonable hope, that it, “maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable.” Keller writes, “Those who know suffering come closer to a

575. Kaethe Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports,” *Family Process* 40, no. 1, (February 2010), 8.

truth about the creation: the future is open, alarmingly or promisingly. The way is not laid out in advance.... There may be no trail before us at all.”⁵⁷⁶ In therapeutic practice, this means the individual does not give in to the diagnostic criterion described as “sense of foreshortened future.” Rather, one maintains a posture of unknowingness about what is to come. The individual recognizes that, though the system has been conditioned to expect calamity, the truth is that the future is unknowable. Compare this to Marcel’s metaphysic of hope, which “is engaged in the weaving of experience now in process, or, in other words, is an adventure now going forward.”⁵⁷⁷ That there is a future to be had at all is the *best* bet because there has always been a future, even after the trauma.

Reasonable hope, then, can precede a comprehensible vision of what is to come. Not only is the future unknowable, but the future is *influenceable*. The trauma survivor’s healing is located in first believing that they have the agency to impact the future.⁵⁷⁸ Theologically, of course, we would situate unknowing in the realm of apophysis. Keller refers to this idea as a “mindful nonknowing of apophatic discourse.”⁵⁷⁹ It means holding open possibility rather than permitting “epistemic closure.”⁵⁸⁰ It means continuing to learn about God, self, and the world, again, anew, after trauma. It means actively resisting the closing down of the future, assuming it could be no different than the lived past.

576. Keller, *On the Mystery*, 0.

577. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 52.

578. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

579. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 27.

580. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 40.

Coming to view the future as open, uncertain, and influenceable, though, is not something one does alone. Because trauma serves to close down the idea that the future could be reasonably different from the past, one needs an intercessor of sorts. This is where one sees some weakness in Rambo's construction of the middle: there is nothing in the idea of the witness that challenges anything the trauma survivor has come to believe, to invite her to release the control mechanisms built to keep the mind insulated from the trauma event. The shift toward superposing doubt and hope within aporia makes especial sense here. Choosing to see the future as uncertain requires consistent risk and deep courage. It makes of the witness, in this case ideally a therapist with significant training in trauma, a compassionate challenger, one who suffers with the trauma survivor but refuses to leave the individual in the vector of closure.

Body

Weingarten says hope is both a practice and is something we do with other persons.⁵⁸¹ As such, it should be viewed as a verb rather than a noun. For this reason, I have situated the practice of hope in the body—the body is where hope becomes actionable. A practice of hope has to do with engaging rather than mere wishing. This shift of considering hope to be a verbal construct rather than a nominal one further concretizes it and helps trauma survivors think of “doing hope together.”⁵⁸² Rather than tacitly quantifying hope (i.e., “How much hope do I need to accomplish _____”), the practice of hope leads one to ask how much one might behave hopefully in any given situation.

581. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

582. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

Keller writes, “A doing will make possible a saying.”⁵⁸³ Or, put differently, *praxis* enables *logoi*; action will make a way back to language. Reasonable hope is an embodied practice insofar as it requires an active participation. The practice of hope is situated in the here-and-now rather than the there-and-then, for one cannot act upon the past or in the future. It takes action toward *doing* reasonable hope, namely engaging people and behaviors to create the aforementioned future that exists as unknowable and influenceable.

Again, hope is an *interpersonal* practice. In trauma, the brain creates neural pathways to fear and hopelessness. Because the brain strives toward efficiency, the more frequently those pathways are engaged the stronger they become. They are, metaphorically speaking, the easy road. Trauma healing represents the rugged path to change, and creating new neural pathways is indeed a challenge.

Word

Word is the most fulsome of these four categories largely because words are among a therapist’s primary currency (there is more on the breath to come later in this chapter). As discussed earlier, one of the things that falls away in trauma is the ability to apply language to the traumatic experience. Because hope requires engagement of the PFC, and because the PFC’s function is diminished in trauma, setting reasonable goals and finding pathways to them is a part of trauma healing, particularly early in the process.⁵⁸⁴ This setting and pursuing of goals activates the reward circuitry of the brain

583. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 91.

584. Guina, Nahhas, Sutton, & Farnsworth, “Trauma Type and Timing,” 75.

and releases a “neurochemical cascade that dampens fear and makes people feel more hopeful.”⁵⁸⁵

One of the core foci of reasonable hope is to give words to building a future. Again, the idea that the future is unknown and influenceable is critical to the development of reasonable hope. Setting reasonable goals and finding pathways to them is much of the work of the therapist early in the clinical relationship. In other words, setting reasonable goals toward the future is inherently relational for persons to develop the capacity for reasonable hope. Reasonable hope is “a humble hope,” Weingarten says. It favors taking one small, concrete step toward a larger, even if seemingly-unattainable goal, for “the small is not trivial.”⁵⁸⁶

Like classical theology, one problem of trauma is that it closes down what was designed to open out, allowing only certain words and questions to speak to an experience that cannot fully be named. Yet more than simply holding verbal space, therapist and client *co-create* space for conversation about the trauma event. They engage one another’s realities in those conversational hope spaces and enter incrementally more deeply into trust. Further, one application of word to the therapeutic relationship is to educate clients about the trauma. Psychoeducation serves to normalize the experience and can assuage anxiety about what may happen when trauma memories emerge and threaten to overwhelm the system. In other words, setting reasonable goals toward the future is inherently relational for those persons whose ability to engage reasonable hope is growing.

585. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope.” 13.

586. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 19.

Questions, too, can help activate reasonable hope. One excellent example is, “What is the work you need hope to do for you?”⁵⁸⁷ Clinically, this question helps the client not only see the need for developing hope, but also reinforces the idea that hope is effective toward healing.

Becoming

When time, body, and hope are reunited, becoming is once again possible. The fourth pathway to reasonable hope, placed here in the category of “becoming,” is that it is relational. Weingarten writes, “Reasonable hope flourishes in relationship.”⁵⁸⁸ She likens it to Martin Buber’s I-Thou relationship, noting, “I hope because we hope.”⁵⁸⁹ She is careful to state, however, that not all relationships can, or even should, foster such hope.⁵⁹⁰

Consider Keller’s ontotheology of relation, wherein God and humanity *become* together because we are inextricably and fundamentally related, whose most basic truth is that “...I and the other *alter* each other.”⁵⁹¹ Naturally, then, one should choose carefully the other by whom one consents to be altered. This is where a good therapist is critical to healing. The person should have trauma skills, of course, though training is necessary but insufficient (to speak in Rogerian terms). The person healing from trauma needs another who is able really to meet them where they are, to *attend* to them, to be a consistent,

587. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 16.

588. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

589. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

590. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope,” 8.

591. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 20., italics retained

persistent, non-anxious presence. This person needs not to close down the client's expression due to their own discomfort, but rather hear the client as she struggles to give voice to her experiences.

The last of Weingarten's five characteristics of reasonable hope is that it accommodates doubts, contradictions, and despair. For her, this means the one who hopes is able to hold together mess and miracle, the unbearable with what must be borne. This individual is able to overcome dichotomy and live in a real world, not one dictated by a perfection/failure dialectic, but rather what I have called a doubt and hope aporia.⁵⁹² Make no mistake: in this healing relationship, doubt, contradictions, and despair will abound.

In the doubt and hope aporia, the shifts needed from infinitude to non-finitude bear on reasonable hope. When doubt is perceived as infinite, it is too overwhelming to countenance. This is where the therapist may offer some of her hope to the client, recalling Weingarten's words, "I hope because we hope."⁵⁹³ Yet doubt is essential to a life of faith and a life *in* faith. Doubt is, paradoxically, what breaks the individual out of the certainty that the trauma cycle is going to continue. Doubt of the known is akin to the undoing of the certainty that accompanies trauma. The goal of reasonable hope is to accept that doubt, contradictions, and despair are part of life, and a part of a *hope-driven* life, at that. To attend to persons with histories of trauma is compassion, literally "suffering with." Reasonable hope allows for doubt to have its place—no more and no less than is needful.

592. Weingarten, "Reasonable Hope," 10.

593. Weingarten, "Reasonable Hope," 8.

Death and Life

Grounded in reasonable hope, a hope that acknowledges and values doubt, the decision whether to embrace the fear of death and the concurrent fear of life is more palpable. Just as Jesus in the garden evaluated the ways of life and death before him, so, too, the trauma client must choose what she is willing to countenance. As I am wont to say to clients, “It’s a real risk, and a real choice.” In the therapeutic relationship, however, the survivor is not left to do this alone. Much like trauma, therapy, too is “the study of what remains.”⁵⁹⁴ Survivor and therapist look at the life the client is living over against the life “before” and the hoped-for “after.” This is the liminal space in which healing is enacted.

The therapeutic communion is situated within a relationship that acknowledges the realities of life and death, that death could have won the day and the life that somehow prevailed. The therapy hour can be transformed into the real presence of God between therapist and client every time they come together. There is no visible change in the pair, no mystical transfiguration of either person. Yet the hour is consubstantiated in the sense that both persons are becoming more substantial *with* one another, *through* one another, and *in* one another and God.

In a very real sense, therapist and client take turns offering the bread of their bodies and the wine of their blood to one another. The client says, “This is my body” each time she is present to her trauma, present to that which has cost her what she knew of life. The therapist replies, “This is my blood, my passion for you and life and

594. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 15.

becoming offered in response to your trauma.” On the altar of pain, a holy consubstantiation occurs, an offering of self to community and God enacted in this microcosm.

This is the mystery of healing: That two broken persons choose to enter into a mutually vulnerable relationship, taking turns being brave and witnessing the other’s courage. For though the therapist rarely shares her own life’s experiences with trauma clients, she must choose to hear the unspeakable, to join the client in pain so sharp, agony so deep, it threatens her own well-being.⁵⁹⁵ If the therapist is herself a trauma survivor, this work is both harder and easier. It is easier to imagine the unimaginable if one has lived it. It is exponentially more difficult to will oneself to come reenter the wilderness of sorrow after having come into a spacious place of healing. Yet this is the call of compassionate care in the therapeutic relationship, the rugged path to change.

We offer our bodies and blood trusting that the God who is in all things chooses to be present in that place, too. We offer our bodies and blood expecting they will be not only who we are, but also more than we are, a hope for *becoming* being realized in this present presence. We offer our bodies and blood uncertain of how precisely the mystery of healing works, trusting the God who suffers with us, too, to become more substantive, more embodied, in the process. Knowing that God suffers with us opens space for us to

595. Myriad studies are available on the effects of secondary traumatization on mental health clinicians. Two good ones include, Keren Dagan, Haya Itzhaky, & Anat Ben-Porat, “Therapists Working with Trauma Victims: The Contribution of Personal, Environmental, and Professional-Organizational Resources to Secondary Traumatization,” *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 16, no. 5 (2015): 592-606; Sharon Gil, “Is Secondary Traumatization a Negative Therapeutic Response?” *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 20, no. 5 (2015): 410-416.

ask, “our most wounded questions.”⁵⁹⁶ In that place, Keller says, “faith will approximate courage.”⁵⁹⁷

One powerful aspect of the therapeutic communion is the way it clings to the client between sessions, which Shea powerfully depicts in poem “Communion” in the previous chapter. Clients may engage the memory of the therapeutic connection in the days and even years to come, drawing courage and strength from the real living that is meeting. That does not mean clients will not despair. As deeply entrenched as despair often is within traumatized persons, it is likely continually to resurface as waves on the shoreline. Despair ebbs and flows, which reasonable hope accommodates but never gives way to entirely.

Despair is deeply embedded in the Passion narrative, yet often obscured by triumphalism and certainty. If we are honestly to enter into the grief of others, we must remember the pain of this loss every week when we come to the altar (in this case, the therapy room). We must remember the work of Jesus in choosing the cup that did not pass from him. We must stand against repressing our grief in favor of comfort, for the raw dread of death has no redemptive gloss in trauma. For the trauma survivor, life is often a continual Passion Week that never opens into Eastertide. As a trauma therapist, you are called to sit in that agony with the client until they are ready to move through it, gently superposing life where you are able.

596. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 140.

597. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 140. As an aside, though I find theodicy generally harmful, and while I believe clinicians who are not theologians should stay away from having discussions with clients about *why* a trauma happened (instead referring them back to their clergyperson), this is where having some grounding in theodicy, as offered in chapter 6, may be helpful.

Therapy is a ritual that can help survivors move through their trauma in the context of a safe-enough relationship.⁵⁹⁸ Like any other ritual, it can take time to establish comfort and safety. For example, most of us did not memorize the words to the Apostles' Creed upon our first recitation thereof. We had to practice within our community, to feel the words in our mouths, to make connections between lines, phrases, and postures.⁵⁹⁹ In like manner, we have to practice therapy, the vulnerabilities, expressions, and unique language inherent thereto. When we have practiced these things with a safe-enough other, and when we have been challenged to allow others to meet our needs, we may begin to re-member the community and our place within it. Recall Stone's words from the previous chapter: "communal practices such as sacraments may provide an important path (a set of counter-performances, if you will) for restoring the capacity of bodily reconnecting to that world."⁶⁰⁰ This is exactly what can happen in good therapy-as-ritual.

In some traditions, my own Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tradition included, we often close our communion with the line, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

Communion, Paul says, is mute testimony, a proclamation that life is not always what it

598. Feeling totally safe in therapy is not the goal, because the client who feels totally safe will not risk that safety to do the hard work of trauma healing. Trauma therapists must walk a delicate wire of challenging clients without pushing them, must maintain the safety of the interpersonal bond while nudging clients toward their fear. I often use the phrase "the safe-enough therapist," riffing on Winnicott's idea of "the good-enough mother." That is to say, on the one hand, the therapist is going to fail at times, whether it be with conveying empathy, meeting a client's felt need, or otherwise. In these situations, if the attachment is strong, repairing the bond is possible and even likely. On the other hand, the therapist should allow the client to experience needs the therapist does not meet so the client will learn to allow others to meet her needs. In so doing, the client learns to trust beyond the walls of the therapy room.

599. In some traditions, such as the Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic, it is customary, but not required, to offer a solemn bow or genuflection at some points during the recitation of the Creed, namely, when the condescension of Christ is mentioned.

600. Stone, "Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist," 53.

seems. And so it is with the counseling communion. Eden can be snatched away in an instant, true enough. But there are ways to remember life persists beyond the grave; the move toward resurrection life is enacted each week in the therapy room. Reasonable hope requires we engage in relationships wherein we practice being challenged to see an open future toward which we set goals while simultaneously holding space for hope over against our felt hopelessness. Often in trauma therapy, clients must look at their “death” experiences time and again, experiencing them bodily as well as intellectually. The communion of therapy can infuse much-needed life on the way to courageous living.

Fear and Courage

After the therapist has cast a vision for what a return to being fully alive can look like, and after the relationship has developed such that the client is able to begin to look at the events of her life honestly, the space opens for the client to begin to face her deep fear and move toward healing. In the therapeutic relationship, the therapist should serve as both a mapmaker and guide, helping the client see what is possible in terms of healing and walking alongside the trauma survivor on the rugged path to change. In time, with much reinforcement, the practice of reasonable hope will alter the survivor-practitioner neurobiologically in a way that eventually makes hopefulness an easier road. Therapy demonstrates one way an individual may be “heard to her own speech.”⁶⁰¹ That hearing, however, need not always come through words. In the third and/or aporia of trauma recovery, fear and courage co-exist to co-create a space for the Spirit and the breath.

One take-away from Bessel van der Kolk’s work on trauma is that the path to recovery is unique to each trauma survivor. This is why the trauma therapist must be an

601. Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home*, 128.

expert mapmaker as well as guide. But here's the rub: being a mapmaker means more than flying over the *topos* and choosing the best path from point A (where the client is) to point B (client healing). This is why the trauma therapist must also be an expert guide, one who knows the dangers of the terrain as well as the client's strengths for overcoming them. This is what it means to be a person on the way, a *homo viator*, who is, in Marcel's words, "a soul that has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will and knowledge the transcendent act...."⁶⁰² This is the person of the trauma therapist.

If all this sounds overwhelming, it should. Trauma therapy is not for clinicians who believe they have it all figured out, who believe there is a one-size-fits-all approach to flourishing. When the therapist recognizes she does not know exactly how to proceed, but she also knows deeply the leitmotifs of traumatic memory, the clinician is not alone. The same Spirit who is identified as the Shekinah (glory), Sophia (wisdom), and Paraclete (helper) is available in the therapeutic communion.

Recall the language of Gottleib's poem "Shechina." In it, she contends the glory of God is exiled within us, calling out from within that exile, to bring us home. Coming home is construed as the place of becoming which already exists within, though we have been separated from it, in this case by trauma. It is in this place the Spirit as God's glory may shine forth as guidance for the next step toward healing, which is to say, homecoming. If the therapist and client are willing not only to listen to a client's internal wisdom but also heed it as Wisdom, both may benefit from Her inspiration. As it came

602. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. E. Crawford (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 67.

into the English language, inspire has both passive and active components. One is inspired (that is, to be filled with something), the other is a response to having been filled.⁶⁰³ This is the space wherein healing is enacted. In this sense, the inspiration of the Spirit as God's glory leads to persons glorying in God (that is, becoming more fully alive).

When stuck in trauma's morass, the therapist may inquire of the client's internal wisdom and her own for a way forward, trusting in the "breath of the power of God" (Sophia) to do Her work in, around, and between the pair.⁶⁰⁴ Recalling that, in Jewish Wisdom theology, "Chokmah/Sophia is the personification... [of] the generative matrix,"⁶⁰⁵ we may use the breath to activate the power of God. In my clinical work, when clients become overwhelmed with their trauma memories, we take some time to help calm the nervous system and allow the client to re-enter her window of tolerance. One such way is to use the breath.⁶⁰⁶ When we take a moment to focus on our breathing, the very fact that we are alive and conscious, we may once again center ourselves in the power of God in us in that very moment.

When we bring attention to an otherwise automatic process, we notice our livingness. "The breath of the power of God" is something of which we may become

603. Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. Inspire, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/inspire>

604. Wis 7:25.

605. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 153.

606. There are myriad breath practices one may use with clients. I often use box breathing with beginners and move on to more targeted breathing techniques based on a client's needs. For clinical research on the utility and pathways of breath work, see Ravinder Jerath, Molly W. Crawford, Vernon A. Barnes, and Kyler Harden, "Self-Regulation of Breathing as a Primary Treatment for Anxiety," *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* 40, no. 2 (2015): 107-115.

aware, the spirit of Wisdom, that “pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty.”⁶⁰⁷ It is in this place that a slowing occurs, where we soften into a centering, and it is there a knowing often emerges. Available to client and clinician alike, the breath often limns a way forward within the therapeutic communion where the sense of overwhelm previously pervaded.

If the Shekinah glory is that which opens a way to the therapeutic communion and the Sophia Wisdom is present when we still ourselves to notice Her presence, then the Paraclete is the Spirit who closes the space between the existence of God and the experience of God. Rambo reads in the Gospel of John that the Spirit, as Paraclete, “provides a critical link between past, present, and future.”⁶⁰⁸ The Paraclete is the fulcrum between the horror from which one wants to distance oneself and the life of fullness to which a survivor is called. That is to say, the Paraclete is viewed as the helper or counselor, capable of making herself known without an intercessor (i.e., the therapist). However, in the counseling communion, the therapist may act as a paraclete, to follow Philo’s example in using a humanly application.⁶⁰⁹ In this place, the Paraclete as God-sent advocate is felt by the therapist, who acts as a God-ordained human helper.

It is here that the *Logos* and *Pneuma* come together in therapy. When, in the therapeutic communion, both parties can access word and breath, can communicate through the *ritual* of therapy as much as through the *content* of therapy, healing permeates the space. The Spirit hovers between them like the mist, clinging, creating,

607. Wis 7:25

608. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 103.

609. Philo of Alexandria, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.237; *De Opificio Mundi* 23.

becoming. In this place, the therapy hour is consubstantiated, allowing the client to become more fully alive.

The three and/and aporias of healthy post-traumatic spirituality are useful in the counseling relationship. They can inform therapeutic practice in ways that allow client and clinician alike to recognize the glory, wisdom, and help of the Spirit of God. Further, this is the place where words—a primary clinical currency—meet the animating breath, pressing toward life to the full. How might pastors apply the and/ands to their congregational work? It is to that question we turn now.

Becoming in the Pastoral Relationship

At the time of this writing, I have been pastoring for five years, with just under two years serving a church as a solo clergyperson. I have also been in congregational leadership for fifteen years in small-to-medium sized churches.⁶¹⁰ Some of the roles in which I have served include in committee head, deacon, elder, pastoral associate, associate pastor, and senior pastor roles during that time. As noted in the introduction, I grew up Brethren, came to faith in an evangelical movement (namely, the Vineyard Association of Churches), was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and now pastor a United Church of Christ. I share all that to say, between the traditions I have experienced and the roles I have occupied, there are many, many right ways to provide pastoral care and “do” theology.

The question of how best to pastor trauma survivors is not often one we consider when thinking about our flocks. How do you pastor-toward-becoming? What I am concerned with here is not doctrinal purity (as if there is any such thing), but how best to help those persons in a congregation wherein some members have certainly experienced trauma.⁶¹¹ Thanks to politics, busyness, and any number of factors competing for pastors’ time, most weeks it feels like we are just trying to get from Monday to Sunday, only to

610. There are many available metrics for church size. USAChurches notes small churches have fewer than 50 in weekly attendance, while medium churches have between 51 and 300 attendees weekly. I have chosen this metric for ease. <http://www.usachurches.org/church-sizes.htm>

611. Estimates of exposure to a Criterion-A trauma in the United States are approximately 90%, with a lifetime prevalence of PTSD around 10% of the population. See Dean G. Kilpatrick, Heidi S. Resnick, Melissa E. Milanak, Mark W. Miller, Katherine M. Keyes, and Matthew J. Friedman, “National Estimates of Exposure to Traumatic Events and PTSD Prevalence using DSM-IV and DSM-5 Criteria.” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 26, no. 5 (2013): 537-547.

start all over again the following day. Being sensitive to trauma, however, affects all facets of church life. Schieb writes,

As a *narrative practice*, pastoral care attends to the inseparable interconnection between our own lifestories [*sic*], others' stories, the larger cultural stories, and God's story. As a ministry of the church, pastoral care is an *ecclesial practice* that derives its motivation, purpose and identity from the larger mission of the church to bear witness to and embody God's mission of love that extends beyond the church for the transformation of the world. As a *theological practice*, pastoral care is grounded in God's love story.⁶¹²

In this chapter, I have endeavored to detail each of these three practices, narrative, ecclesial, and theological, in practical terms. I have situated trauma sensitivity in the three and/or aporias of life in the church: doubt and hope, death and life, fear and courage, and mapped each as an area of congregational life over which the pastor has influence: pastoral counseling, preaching, and the church as it is situated in the community.

Doubt and Hope

I recognize at the outset of this section that training in pastoral counseling varies widely. Some ordaining bodies require multiple units of Clinical Pastoral Education for ordination, whereas other bodies ordain based on gifting alone and require no formal education. There are many models of counseling Christians may engage, ranging from nou�hetic counseling ("confronting" believers with "truths" from Scripture) to mainstream secular psychology. As a Christian who is a licensed mental health professional as well as an ordained member of the clergy, I am comfortable integrating a person's worldview and scripture into my work *to the degree the client or parishioner expresses interest*. It is not my job to tell people what to believe, though often

612. Karen D. Schieb, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2016), 1.

parishioners come with questions about *how* to believe in the wake of trauma. However, in the space of superposing belief, clinicians and clergy alike may open space for questioning the client's certainties. This, then, is the goal of doubt and hope in a pastoral counseling context. If a trusted spiritual advisor gently suggests that the parishioner does not have to remain in the space of traumatic closure and refers the person to a helpful other, the parishioner is more likely to seek help and still receive support from within the faith community.

The degree to which you counsel persons with trauma should be based on your training. If you do not have clinical training in trauma, you *should not be offering in-depth counseling to trauma survivors*. Full stop. Pastoral care in this context would look like hearing what a parishioner is open to sharing and offering referrals to licensed professionals in your area.⁶¹³ I noted in the previous chapter that clinicians who are not formally trained in theology should not, in general, be offering theological advice, and the same is true for clergy with respect to trauma training. One important task for clergy, then, is to develop a network of trusted clinicians to whom to refer. We want to be “all things to all people,” but often the covert motivation for providing counseling outside our scope is pride or the weight of others’ expectations, not submitting to the difficulties of life to which Christians are called by Paul in this text.⁶¹⁴ What all clergy *can* do, at a minimum, is be aware of the science of trauma.

613. Please note that asking for details about a person’s trauma is inappropriate and potentially re-traumatizing. Even if parishioners offer such information, I urge them to give only a “flyover” of the trauma so as not to engage the limbic system’s fight-or-flight response. Clergy need to know only those details most critical to pointing them in the direction of a skilled helper.

614. 1 Cor 9:22.

Trauma operates in specific ways; it has its own language (namely, “the language of the unsayable”).⁶¹⁵ In chapter 4, I outline the impact of trauma on the self. Briefly, trauma impacts a person’s understanding of time, body, word, and becoming. To reunite the first three is the task of healing, which allows for becoming. After the parishioner begins to work with a licensed professional, clergy can continue to walk alongside the survivor, meeting with them to encourage them in their faith and healing journey, and even offer to assist with their homework, should their therapist assign any. Further, clergy can debrief with survivors about how they are experiencing the therapeutic process, pray with them, and offer an encouraging presence. They may offer spiritual assistance in ways that augment the parishioner’s work with the therapist rather than work at cross-purposes with it.⁶¹⁶

All clergy may work to create safety for parishioners, but safety is not found in the thought-terminating cliché, rather in opening space for a parishioner’s real feelings and “most wounded questions.”⁶¹⁷ One task of pastoral counseling is risking real connection with the other, having compassion for the person, “suffering with” them. Sitting in the unknowing is good and needful, even—and perhaps especially—if it means coming to understand some small measure of the trauma survivor’s reality. Clinical and pastoral counselors alike all know the fear of being unsure what to say next; this is one small way of being present to our parishioner’s daily realities as trauma survivors. Both of these are expressions of doubt—doubting that another can help, and doubting our

615. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 21.

616. For example, if a clinician is trying to help a survivor build safer relationships in community, it would be unhelpful for a clergyperson to focus on spiritual practices that encourage isolation.

617. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 140.

knowledge. The good news is that parishioners do not require our knowledge so much as our willingness to be present to them. Just as Sophia is presented largely as Wisdom in her stillness, so too may we be still in sitting with the apophatic unknown before us. We may sit as the stories of our parishioner's traumas echo in the silence. We may experience their narratives in their stories and silences alike. The stories survivors tell themselves inhabit the space between you, weaving between the spoken and unspoken.

To fill the apophatic space with words that cannot change the parishioner's mind is to further embed harm and to deny the work of the Spirit. One counseling maxim I learned early in my career was WAIT—which stands for, “Why am I talking?” When we become more comfortable in the discomfort of silence and waiting, God has space to work in the one to whom I am ministering. In the pastoral counseling space, the discomfort of silence can create safety if the clergyperson is willing to sit with it rather than hurry to close it. There are a great many environments that are not emotionally and spiritually safe. As human beings, we are uncomfortable with what we do not know and therefore create stories to fill the voids. Too often clergy seek to close the apophatic space, the space of unknowing and unsaying, with our creeds and doctrinal stances, but trauma survivors often know these same documents and find them insufficient to speak to their pain and lived experience. What they need is your presence and for you to open space for them to listen to a “sound of sheer silence”⁶¹⁸ that gives way to their own knowing. Your flock needs to know that you are open to their wounding, and will not try to defend God's honor at the expense of their hearts (more on theodicy in chap. 6).

618. 1 Kings 19:12.

The discomfort of unknowing, especially as a religious professional, can be great. Tumminio Hansen notes one thing clergy should do to combat our discomfort is to “recognize the *telos*.” That is, “It’s important for caregivers to remember that the process of recovering from trauma takes time. Its *telos* is far off.” The *telos* of healing is in God’s hands, but one may cultivate an environment of spiritual safety in the here-and-now. One way to begin to do so is to ask parishioners what they need to feel safe. If a clergyperson is able to provide that safety by opening space for parishioners to feel as they feel, they take the onus off the trauma survivor to rush into the meaning-making process before they are ready. Regarding the importance of clergy, Tumminio Hansen writes, “Faith leaders are on the front lines of creating trauma-resilient communities: spaces in which people can begin to feel safe enough to search for meaning in challenging events.⁶¹⁹ This is one way the pastor may serve as a bearer of Sophia while waiting for the Paraclete.

In so doing, too, the clergyperson is setting the conditions for the survivor to experience the Holy. Taking time to invite the presence of God in a pastoral counseling context, and then waiting to experience what God does in that space, can in itself be healing. Without adding words or actions to the waiting, survivors learn that someone in their life knows what has happened to them and still cares for them. Recall Buber’s words, “All real living is meeting.”⁶²⁰ In the context of pastoral counseling, the clergyperson who is willing truly to *meet* with the survivor and hear the stories of their lives is setting the conditions for the parishioner to become more fully alive. In

619. Danielle Tumminio Hansen, “We’re all Traumatized Now (Four Ways to Shift to Trauma Informed Ministry),” *The Christian Century* 137, no. 21 (2020): 10-11.

620. Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

experiencing the safety of the clergy-parishioner relationship, and by setting the conditions for the survivor to experience God, doubt can co-exist with hope. This is the power of narrative, where the survivor's story meets God's story, the place where the Paraclete begins to break through the lies of trauma and speak truth to the survivor. This is how the narrative can begin to change when clergy work with their parishioners and their care teams collaboratively.

Death and Life

Pastoral care is also a theological practice, writes Karen Scheib. Most of us were first introduced to the beliefs of our tradition via story and ritual. These tales inform the stories we create about our lives, too, for good or for ill. How, then, might clergy use the liturgical space to inhabit the and/or aporia of life and death? I suggest we may preach effectively via story toward life as well as use ritual to describe the overcoming of death.

Preaching, like pastoral counseling, is unique to each tradition. In my childhood, sermons were often 45 minutes or more, and this was the same when I was in Evangelical spaces. Coming to the mainline, however, rarely do I preach a sermon lasting more than 15 minutes!⁶²¹ Even so, *how* we approach preaching bears on trauma and trauma recovery.

Preaching texts full of grief, such as Jeremiah and Lamentations (see chap. 5 of this project for more information on those books) is important to help normalize those difficult emotions within the context of the church. Holding regular opportunities for

621. Pew Research states Catholic sermons average 14 minutes, Mainline Protestant at 25 minutes, Evangelical Protestant at 39 minutes, and historical Black Protestant sermons at 54 minutes. Historically black Protestant churches had by far the longest sermons, at a median of 54 minutes. <https://apnews.com/article/d5c3a0bd7726f18d5cff44efa1bd4cf#:~:text=According%20to%20Pew%2C%20the%20median,minutes%20in%20evangelical%20Protestant%20congregations>.

folks to experience and process grief is important. If your church is in a liturgical tradition, the church year allows for many such services. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday services, for example, represent opportunities to grieve.⁶²² Longest Night or Blue Christmas services, too, are especially designed for those who are grieving around the holidays.⁶²³

The biblical text contains stories that span the full spectrum of human emotions. From Rachel weeping over her children to the Psalmist with a heart of melted wax to Elijah wishing he was dead rather than face Queen Jezebel, the text is full of strong emotions.⁶²⁴ Not to be forgotten, the book of Job is the story of trauma after trauma. Do not gloss over the strong emotions of scripture, or choose to engage in spiritual bypassing by over-spiritualizing people's trauma.⁶²⁵ Likewise, do not gloss over the very problematic choices of biblical heroes, such as the attempted murder of Isaac or David's rape of Bathsheba.⁶²⁶ These texts are full of trauma and, though preachers should use caution in how they present the texts, they should, indeed, be preached as the texts of terror that they are. Talking about therapy from the pulpit, too, is a way to normalize it.

622. For those looking for practical ways to implement the expression of grief (i.e., lament) into their worship services, Faithward has a useful "toolkit" available. Faithward, "Lament Toolkit: Understanding and Practicing Biblical Lament," accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.faithward.org/lament-toolkit-understanding-and-practicing-biblical-lament/>

623. Mary Cartledgehayes, "Blue Christmas," *The Christian Century* 120, no. 26 (2003): 8.

624. Jer 31; Ps 22; 1 Kings 19.

625. "Spiritual bypassing, a term first coined by psychology John Welwood in 1984, is the use of spiritual practices and beliefs to avoid dealing with our painful feelings, unresolved wounds, and developmental needs." Robert Augustus Masters, *Spiritual Bypassing: When Spirituality Disconnects Us from What Really Matters* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic, 2010), 1.

626. For a deeper understanding of literary-feminist readings of biblical narratives that consider the impact of the text, see Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

This helps your flock hear from their spiritual leader's lips that healing can come through multiple means.⁶²⁷ Because therapy is a means of healing that was not available to those in our faith's stories (at least not such as it is today), many in your pews will need help believing it is a viable, faithful means of healing. As a pastor, giving your parishioners permission to seek such healing can be a beautiful gift.

Refusing to shy away from the big emotions of scripture means that we do not skip the hard texts, but that does not mean we pass over the redemptive ones. To be sure, “evergreen stories” are important, for they instill hope for what the world *can* be. Tumminio Hansen writes,

Christianity is a faith made of evergreen stories, with timeless themes to help believers make sense of the chaos of the world. Humans in a variety of circumstances attempt to account for evil, seek to understand their own fallibility and vulnerability, and search for hope. The texts and wisdom of the Christian tradition aim to address those big-picture questions.

The evergreen stories of faith can provide a deep sense of spiritual grounding during unstable times because the messages of hope and comfort embedded in them are so familiar. The words of well-known Bible passages and hymns can help individuals regain a sense of spiritual safety even when physical and psychological safety cannot be assured.⁶²⁸

Even as we work to recognize and preach on the full spectrum of emotions in the biblical text, so too we engage ritual to re-enact the Christian narrative. I wrote extensively about this in the death/life aporia in chapter 10, but I will recapitulate briefly

627. There are many ways to approach pastoral transparency from the pulpit. My church hired me knowing I was a licensed mental health professional, so they are not surprised when I talk about therapy in sermons or pastoral care situations. This is not true for other individuals, and in some circumstances, talking about therapy could be grounds for termination. That is not to say normalizing therapy is unimportant. What I am advocating here, then, is neither oversharing from one's own experience nor shying away from the discussion altogether. Rather, I am suggesting you talk about mental health and wellness in a way that is appropriate to your context.

628. Tumminio Hansen, “We’re all Traumatized Now,” 10.

here. In the place of communion, the table is where the presence of Christ both dwells and un-dwells. In this place, we offer language to unspeakable betrayal and pain, helping our parishioners to do the same. In this place, we speak of the transcendent as closely as possible. To participate in the table in an embodied manner means to “tell the truth about ourselves, as impossible as that truth may be.”⁶²⁹ When we come to the table as our most wounded, authentic selves, we are able to witness true suffering without “pretending that it is redemptive...or that it can be neatly erased.”⁶³⁰ We enter into mutually vulnerable relationships, noticing that our own trauma, our own “mystery” is “placed on the Lord’s table.”⁶³¹

This is part of what it means to re-member communion, as Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson remind us. They note, “Healing from a traumatic past is a life-long process. The re-membered Body can enjoy vitality, even if its vitality is diminished by a past we find ways to acknowledge and integrate into who we are becoming.”⁶³² Noting that Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson are writing primarily with the goal of reckoning with the racial injustices and trauma present within the church, still their applications to the re-membering of communion are useful for our context. This is because, “wounds are not localized on any one body but, instead, curiously cross

629. Marcia Mount Shoop & Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 154.

630. Stone, “Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist,” 57.

631. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272.

632. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 155.

bodies.”⁶³³ Again, in process theology, this is not curious at all. I am affected by all around me, I affect all around me, and God is among and within that “all around.”

Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson suggest that recovery has three main components: flexibility, imagination, and connection. Flexibility means “looking inward at the congregation itself” and asking questions of ourselves. Mapped onto a trauma recovery schema, the questions become ones like, Is there a way we can name the harm that has occurred to some within our walls? Is there a new way to enact change with respect to how we handle (or ignore) traumas we know of peripherally? Flexibility, in Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson’s lexicon means displacing our obliviousness, looking around at the people with whom we commune, and ensuring that all who are hungry get what they need. This is what it means to “allow a new imprint to take hold in which whiteness can be acknowledged and explored in all its complexity.”⁶³⁴ If we substitute trauma more broadly for the particular trauma of racism, the principle holds, for with this kind of flexibility, we can begin to reckon with any particular sin in our midst.

Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson go on to write, “Flexibility is best nurtured with robust theological and existential imagination.” Notice how this idea rhymes with the goals of trauma recovery, of becoming again. To become is to maintain that “the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable.”⁶³⁵ To feel safe enough to imagine a hopeful future is a hallmark of trauma recovery. The person mired in traumatic memory

633. Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, loc. 325.

634. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 157.

635. Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports,” 8.

cannot, in the beginning, hope for the future because hope is too dangerous a thing. When survivors can countenance hope, they can imagine a different life for themselves and others. At the table, we may practice the surrender to hope, to God, to becoming. As clergy, we can practice imagining around the table in a number of ways. For example, “The practices of surrender and letting go of the need to control the process can be felt in using things like silence instead of spoken word in prayer around the Table.”⁶³⁶ If we can use our imagination—theological and existential—we can conceive not only new ways to commemorate the experience at the table, not only that it is our own mystery placed upon the table, but also new ways of being, or re-membering, toward becoming.

Finally, Mound Shoop and McClintock-Fulkerson suggest connection is the third means of re-membering communion. Regarding racialized trauma, they suggest developing a “double consciousness,” meaning that the dominant group come to see themselves differently, and “obliviousness to the ‘other’ be transformed in the intimacy of face-to-face relationships that call on us to be vulnerable.” They go on,

Such transformation is not the replacement of obliviousness with charity, but the complicated discernment, with attendant and inevitable incompetency, that our own well-being depends upon that of the “other.” These dynamics can find a home around the Table when we share Communion facing each other, sharing our hopes and fears, and seeking God’s mysterious presence together.⁶³⁷

They suggest sharing power, engaging in discourse, and using new practices like *lectio divina* may be useful for creating those new connections. Importantly, they note, “As new

636. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 158.

637. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 158.

practices and habits emerge so will new dispositions toward one another and toward ourselves.”⁶³⁸ And is this not the goal of trauma recovery, writ large? Keller notes, “A doing will make possible a saying.”⁶³⁹ Grounded in story and ritual, when we engage the practices of flexibility, imagination, and connection around the table, we begin to see one another rightly. This way of being enables a more appropriate engagement of fear and courageous correction within our body and helps us understand what it means for pastoral care to be grounded in the community.

Fear and Courage

For Scheib, pastoral care is also an *ecclesial* practice, “that derives its motivation, purpose and identity from the larger mission of the church to bear witness to and embody God’s mission of love that extends beyond the church for the transformation of the world.”⁶⁴⁰ In the tradition in which I was ordained, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), our ecclesiology is centered around the communion table. In that tradition, we believe in the priesthood of all believers and the importance of communion as a sacrament, the place where we are refreshed in our faith and take seriously its claims and attendant responsibilities. The communion table reminds us that we are called to become a countercultural prophetic community, and then *go become it*.

Following Bader-Saye, the call of the church is, “not to limit ourselves to a few things but to open ourselves charitably and generously to many things.”⁶⁴¹ In *Following*

638. Mount Shoop & McClintock Fulkerson, “Transforming Memory: Re-membering Eucharist,” 158.

639. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 91.

640. Schieb, *Pastoral Care*, 1.

641. Bader-Saye, “Thomas Aquinas and the Culture of Fear,” 105.

Jesus in a Culture of Fear, Bader-Saye casts a vision for the church in which it offers hospitality to the world; counteracts fear and its products; and then produces hospitality, peacemaking, and generosity. He casts a particular kind of fear in the culture as the problem to be overcome, writing, “Disordered and excessive fear has significant moral consequences. It fosters a set of shadow virtues, including suspicion, preemption, and accumulation, which threaten traditional Christian virtues such as hospitality, peacemaking, and generosity. Thus, in an interesting way our preoccupation with safety provides a temporary, though artificial, solution to our moral fragmentation.”⁶⁴²

While this project makes no specific claim of being a Christian ethic, still, the question of what it means to be (and become) the church is central to the Christian life, and therefore bears on practical ecclesiology. To become a countercultural community aware of and working to combat the “shadow ethics” Bader-Saye cites is to become the kind of community for which Jesus casts a vision in the Gospels, a path toward courage. Yet this journey is not one that seeks to conquer or overcome fear. Bader-Saye writes, “The path out of fear is not power but trust, not strength but vulnerability before God.”⁶⁴³

Notice how this idea rhymes with a vision for healthy post-traumatic spirituality in chapter 10. The goal of trauma recovery is not to become unafraid and “bulletproof”—there is no such thing—but rather to hold aporetic space for both fear and courage to be true and needful, in balance. As a community of the faithful, seeking to recover a vision for the world that aligns with God’s will for the world, how may we *be* the church in ways that seek to help heal trauma?

642. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 26.

643. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 13.

By fostering the values of hospitality, peacemaking, and generosity, the church can become a healing space for its members and the broader community. Let us attend briefly to each of them. Hospitality—true hospitality—is a matter of moving toward the center of our resurrection life, namely Jesus, which in turn moves us toward those who are outside the known. Bader-Saye uses the example of the early church in Acts who, after the Pentecost, began to expand their “borders,” in quick succession sketching Philip’s baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, Peter sharing the good news with the Roman centurion Cornelius, and the reception of Paul and Barnabas by the Gentiles even as they were rejected by their community.⁶⁴⁴ The community grew because not only did it know its borders (what it stood for) but also was capable of allowing those boundaries to morph (whom it accepted). In the end, “Hospitality requires that a community be capable of receiving difference as gift.”⁶⁴⁵ In a pastoral context, this may mean asking hard questions. For example, is our identity based on who does and does not belong? Here, I mean not confusing the distinct constructs of welcoming and belonging. Most churches say all are welcome, but what is the limit of your welcome? Belonging is more than simply having a seat in the sanctuary. If persons cannot belong, if they cannot develop authentic spaces for meeting within your community, your church is not welcoming. Becoming hospitable is a means of re-membering the body of Christ and fulfilling the mission of the church.⁶⁴⁶

644. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 88.

645. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 90.

646. A full discussion of whether some persons should belong is beyond the scope of this project, but I want to be sure I am not misunderstood here. Some persons may *not* belong in your community due to your decision to welcome others. For example, those who decry the blessedness of LGBTQ+ persons when your space affirms the holiness of all loving relationships may not find a fit within your walls. Our

Becoming hospitable to trauma survivors means being careful about what your culture normalizes and inculcates. How much physical touch is routine in your gathering, for example? Are there ways for persons not to engage without feeling embarrassed—or worse, forced—into the “benevolent” bear hug of an overenthusiastic deacon? (Having grown up a trauma survivor in a foot-washing tradition, I can relate to the feeling of discomfort of my consent and will being violated by religious practices meant to instill humility. Humility is one thing, violation is another, and the expectation of participation in any ritual is violating.) Engaging in spaces where consent is violated can be significantly re-traumatizing for survivors. Making creative space for alternative practices for those who choose not to participate in certain activities that involve physical touch is one way of being trauma-sensitive. True hospitality does not require engaging as all others do, but rather says, “There is room for you here to engage when and how you are comfortable.”

Peacemaking is Bader-Saye’s second corrective to excessive fear. From the outset, I should note that I was raised in a pacifist tradition, and retain pacifism as a Christian value in my life. Bader-Saye problematizes both pacifism and the support of so-called just war, stating both rely on a Providential idea of God (defined here as whatever happens happening because that is what God wanted to have happen).⁶⁴⁷ Jensen expands

welcome is extended to all, but our community covenant, whatever that may be, sets boundaries for acceptable behavior. Allowing the Gospel’s message of welcome to be hijacked and bastardized to mean we must allow for all kinds of abuse is wrong, and clergy need, lovingly and staunchly, to reinforce what is permissible within the communities they serve. Using Bader-Saye’s language, we need to know our boundaries and allow them to morph only when it is appropriate for them to do so.

647. “But if whatever happens is God’s will, then whoever wins is God’s winner. This distorted use of providence would tell us that if a nation succeeds in dominating others, it is because God wants it to dominate others. Too often, the winners get to write not only the histories but also the theologies. Those who invoke providence to support self-interested aggression never seem too concerned that this puts God on the side of the strong, the rich, and the powerful—the empires of the world—even though Jesus’s own

upon the historical characteristics of divine providence, including transcendence, eternity, omnipotence.⁶⁴⁸ Providence, understood in this way, then, is contrary to the claims of process theology. Bader-Saye's criticism is a weighty one, to be sure; both pacifism and support of "just war" can lead to loss of life. He suggests, "Christian just war, as much as pacifism, requires a disciplined life, a readiness to risk self for others, and *a willingness to live with insecurity* rather than to secure oneself, one's family, or one's nation unjustly. Fear tells us that 'all is fair in love and war.' But for Christians there can be no such belief."⁶⁴⁹

Before delving into the importance of a willingness to live with insecurity, I want to touch on the problem of Providence, classically conceived, for trauma survivors. Believing that whatever happens is according to God's plan, or any other variation of "everything happens for a reason" is telling trauma survivors that what happened to them was acceptable—and even sanctioned by the Holy—because God knew it was going to happen and did nothing to stop it.⁶⁵⁰ Beyond a (needful) theological and ideological reckoning, how might Christians move from excessive fear toward a willingness to live with insecurity? Peter Enns contends that the way forward is not to "find the answer that will allow familiar ways of thinking of God and our world to somehow stay as they were. The way forward is to let go of that need to find the answers we crave and decide to

life and witness puts God on the side of the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed—the losers of history." Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 99. For an explication of Bader-Saye's understanding of Providence, see Scott Bader-Saye, "Aristotle Or Abraham? Church, Israel, and the Politics of Election," PhD diss., Duke University, 1997

648. Alexander S. Jensen, *Divine Providence and Human Agency: Trinity, Creation and Freedom* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014).

649. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 105, italics supplied.

650. For more on the problems of theodicy, refer to chap. 6 of this project.

continue along a path of faith *anyway....*⁶⁵¹ Peacemaking, then, may be viewed as an unknowing of theological certainty. In terms of engaging the community, peacemaking may come through dialogue. What might it mean to be open to dialogue with ecumenical and interfaith clergy in your community? What might it mean to converse as a fellow thinker with those who come to you with questions?⁶⁵² Engaging a skill of pastoral counseling, namely, asking appropriate questions and allowing a person to consider the implications of their theology, whether embedded or deliberative, is one way of moving toward peacemaking by letting go of certainty. As it relates to trauma survivors, clergy should be even more careful not to supply easy answers or double down on their certainties. This is one thing it can mean to be courageous within and without the community of faith.

The third antidote to fear is risking generosity. For Bader-Saye, this has to do with loosening our grip on our resources. More than that, generosity has to do with counteracting the narrative of scarcity so prevalent in our culture and, I would add, even more so in our churches. Using the example of God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness, the place of scarcity, Bader-Saye notes that we, too, may "liv[e] into the gift of Divine provision," for "God gives abundantly not just so that they will have enough, but so that they will be able to participate in the joy of sharing God's abundance with

651. Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires our Trust More than Our "Correct" Beliefs* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2016), 133.

652. I am aware of the concerns around treating all opinions as equally valid or sound. I am not suggesting you treat a parishioner's wrong facts as truth (e.g., the Earth is flat), but I am advocating for being willing to listen respectfully when members of your flock share their realities vulnerably with you. As my ethics professor, Dr. Mindy McGarrah-Sharp said, "Crisis is not the time to try to change someone's theology!" You may engage a discussion of embedded vs. deliberative theology at an appropriate future juncture, but in the moment someone is sharing their hurt with you, the appropriate response is to be present with them without seeking to resolve the pain or confusion.

others. As in the story of manna in the desert, the reality of abundance for all requires not only God's provision but human participation in the just distribution of the abundance God has provided.”⁶⁵³

Combatting scarcity is a two-pronged process for Bader-Saye: remembering the Sabbath and celebrating the Eucharist. We have discussed the latter at length throughout the last three chapters. Of the former, he writes,

Sabbath-keeping is a way of... enacting the belief that God will provide. One day each week, we give up providing for ourselves, we do not work or strive or struggle to get more things or secure our future. On this day, we practice the kind of reliance on God that can sustain our generosity throughout the rest of the week. But Sabbath is more than a day, or better put, it is a day that gestures beyond itself to other habits and practices that support God's economy in everyday living.⁶⁵⁴

The economy to which Israel was called was one of “abundance and trust.” In such an economy, “The abundance of God is to be held lightly, permitted to flow through the hands of those who have much, to bring blessing to those who have little.”⁶⁵⁵ For Webb, our generosity must be grounded in three suppositions toward the “theo-ecomics of God”: God's generosity should be the template for our own, and is a response thereto; the excess of God's generosity is a demand for reciprocity and solidarity with those who have fewer resources; and God's excess of generosity is a template for reciprocity and solidarity for the purpose of community building.⁶⁵⁶ The excess of God's generosity highlights “the poetics of the impossible,” refusing to reduce

653. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 114.

654. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 119.

655. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 120.

656. Stephen D. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996).

the generosity of the Deity to “a prose of the possible.” Webb continues, “A hyperbolic imagination of God's giving sees the world as it really is, but in addition sees it as it most certainly is not—that is, as what it can become and therefore was meant to be.”⁶⁵⁷ This is what it means that “*divine excess begets reciprocity.*”⁶⁵⁸ God gives both Godself “and the givenness of things that allows us to recognize, multiply, and return God's gifts.”⁶⁵⁹

This concept of giving rhymes well with Scheib’s ecclesial model of pastoral care.⁶⁶⁰ The givenness of the gift of community is expressed in the panoply of gifts *within* the community to be used *toward* the community. Scheib’s calls her model a “communion ecclesiology.” In this ecclesiology, “Divine love… becomes the foundation for the church. The character of this Divine love is such that the church cannot remain turned inward, but is called to spread Divine love within and beyond the Christian community.”⁶⁶¹ The call to courage, then, is sitting in the tensions of the individual-communal and universal-contextual dimensions of existence. To risk generosity in this setting is to honor diversity and celebrate mutuality. Regarding caring for trauma survivors in the community, clergy would do well to remember the gift of the other. Trauma survivors bring us face-to-face with things we may not wish to countenance. Nevertheless, survivors are all around us in varying stages of healing. In both my clinical

657. Webb, *The Gifting God*, 141.

658. Webb, *The Gifting God*, 90, italics retained.

659. Webb, *The Gifting God*, 91.

660. Karen D. Scheib, “Contributions of Communion Ecclesiology to the Communal-Contextual Model of Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 28-50.

661. Scheib, “Contributions of Communion Ecclesiology to the Communal-Contextual Model of Care, 37.

and pastoral roles, I have received the gift of survivors' stories and wisdom, and I have been changed by them. If we let them, being entrusted with survivors' stories can stretch and grow our faith and give us courage to continue in a life of faith.

As Diane Langberg writes, "We were created to be image bearers and meant to bear the image of God in our person.... When we sit with something long enough, we bear its image in our person. You cannot sit with depression, abuse, strife, fear, etc. and not be shaped by it. If I habitually reflect trauma or sit with trauma, I will bear the image of trauma in my person." She goes on, "We cannot bring life to dead places... apart from the Spirit of God... *That* work, no matter what you call it, will be used by God to change us into his likeness..."⁶⁶² Perhaps this is one meaning of Irenaeus' words—when we are formed into the image of God, when the Spirit of God brings life into dead places, when we behold the Holy One in our work with another, we may be said to be fully alive.

662. Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 314; 316-217.

The Participles of Healing

As I come to the end of this project, I confess I feel restless. I recognize in myself a tendency to want to overthink, overwrite, overproduce to meet the standard of some invisible audience. “Surely,” the inner critic says, “You have failed to account for the import of Dionysian theology on the apophatic realm, and therefore have left too much unsaid” (no pun intended). “Certainly,” it continues, “You have neglected some critical, practical aspect of trauma therapy theologians will need truly to understand the move you are asking them to consider with you.” Perhaps both these things and more are true. Yet I hope that contained herein is a theology robust enough to cover the many weaknesses, I am certain, remain.

Keller writes, “Theology is a way of discerning divinity in process. The process is both that of our faith seeking understanding—and of that which we seek to understand.”⁶⁶³ One goal of this project has been discerning, or perhaps uncovering, divinity *in fieri, in fidem*. I can only say with confidence that I have sought to understand, toward becoming and toward deeper faith, more of the character of the Holy Mystery in the writing of this project. I have become more fully alive through this writing, have glimpsed more of God’s glory through the meditative, mystical process of setting down truths burning so long in my bones. I thank you for coming along with me, and hope that, where weakness abounds, grace will abound that much more.

After all the ink spilled here, again I ask, what does it mean to be fully alive after trauma? I suggest it means that we are able to hold together the three and/ands of aporia,

663. Keller, *On the Mystery*, 25.

individually and interpersonally. In the space of aporia, we begin to recognize that doubt and hope, death and life, and fear and courage are not polarized but superposed. I suggest, too, that the aporetic space is one wherein meaning is superposed rather than superimposed. In superposing, one places something on or above something else, such that that “the two figures coincide throughout their whole extent.”⁶⁶⁴ Superposing does not force a perspective, but rather allows it to emerge as the two objects come into view. Similarly, a listener does not force one’s perspective on a trauma survivor but recognizes the space from which the aporetic impasse emerges. One cannot divorce hope from doubt, death from life, or fear from courage, for the existence of one necessitates the other—they are, therefore, coinciding. Neither are the and/ands epistemic or ontic opposites, each striving toward a pole of existence. Rather, in the aporetic space, both exist in a kind of *khora* that allows becoming-in-relationship to emerge as both healing strategy and ontic reality.

In the and/and of doubt and hope, we can cast doubt on the God of classical theism who has failed us, the Word and words that have failed us, the world that has failed us, and still find in the aporetic space a Deity who is “the source of our mutual vulnerability as well as our fondest community.”⁶⁶⁵ This God retains God’s personal nature, experiencing and participating in intimacy with the world. This God, too, is real and knowable even as the Holy Mystery resists and “transcends all our domestications of reality, including those generated by theology and even the Bible itself.”⁶⁶⁶ This God is

664. Merriam-Webster, s.v. *Superpose*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superpose>; Dictionary.com, s.v., *Superpose*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/superpose>

665. Keller, *On the Mystery*, 22.

non-finite rather than infinite, interpersonal rather than impassible. In the space wherein doubt and hope coexist, God becomes more real and healing becomes more possible.

Hope, in this doubt/hope aporia, is that which defies “the closed, fixed, stifling world of despair.”⁶⁶⁷ For Marcel, “...hope is always rooted in ‘availability’ (‘disponibilité’), a dynamic, sensitive receptivity and ‘communion,’ ‘the self’s participation in being, or being-with’, that is, with a deeper and wider capacity for loving.”⁶⁶⁸ Notice, here, that hope is rooted in its availability. For Marcel, hope becomes available only when it is needed.⁶⁶⁹ In this way, hope materializes in despair and facilitates connection. In Marcel’s definition, being-with is a natural outworking of hope, resulting in an increased capacity to love. When we hold open space for doubting the God we have been taught to believe in and risk hope, we commune with others and the God we thought we knew, only to come to know God, others, and ourselves more truly. Hope, then, is born of distress and co-created in community.

The second aporia, death and life, considers how one might engage the fear of death and choose life in a given situation as well as a general posture toward the world. I contend this is nowhere more visible in the biblical text than in Garden of Gethsemane, wherein Jesus makes the decision to see his love for the world and its inhabitants to its end. The end of that love was death, not because Jesus needed to die to satisfy the wrath

666. Marcus Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously But Not Literally*, Rev. ed., (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), loc. 284, Kindle.

667. Seymour Cain, *Gabriel Marcel’s Theory of Religious Experience* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1995), 175.

668. Paul Marcus, *In Search of the Spiritual: Gabriel Marcel, Psychoanalysis and the Sacred*, (London, England: Karnac Books, 2013), 43.

669. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 36.

of God, but because Jesus was too committed to bearing the love of God in the world to do anything else. Jesus chose to show humanity that fear need not hinder one's love for God, and expressed that love in committed action *toward* God and the world. In this way, Jesus may serve as an exemplar for trauma recovery. In the decision to countenance death, Jesus was strengthened by sharing a meal with his friends.⁶⁷⁰ It is on this text the Christian concept of communion is founded, and it is, I contend, what gave Jesus the strength to endure that garden experience.

Life, as I have defined it here, is found in communion. Like Jesus sharing a meal with his friends and drawing strength for the road ahead, so, too, may we. We may be healed in the sharing of this meal and what it symbolizes, what Augustine called our "own mystery ... placed on the Lord's table."⁶⁷¹ In a move that disorients and reorients, "... sharing of bread and wine, serves as a departure from traumatic reenactment and brings new possibilities for healing and solidarity."⁶⁷² In this space, we are able to recognize our resurrection through re-membering the body of Christ. Living and meeting become our communion through the co-occurring acts of re-membering and remembering. Having been met so met by God and community, we begin to live more fully and carry that life outside the church's walls. From that space, our communion can mark the beginnings of salvation.

The third and/or of aporia is fear and courage. Fear is a near-constant companion for trauma survivors, and, with it, the desire for someone to save the person from

670. Mt 26:17–29; Mk 14:12–25; Lk 22:7–3

671. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 272, retrieved from http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine_sermon_272_eucharist.htm

672. Stone, "Trauma, Reality, and Eucharist," 54.

trauma's grip. For salvation really to be salvific, it must not exist merely in some future heavenly hope, but also in the life we have now. In the Christian tradition, however, a future hope is all the hope many survivors have ever been offered. In the delayed Parousia, one can either recast the heavenly hope as relegated to some unseen future or ground that hope in the life we have now. I suggest, in line with Eastern Christian traditions, that θεραπεύω, as an interpersonal practice and means of healing may be cast as salvific. If we frame salvation as being therapeutic in nature, then the needfulness of community comes into sharp relief. Bader-Saye notes, "...if we are to recover courageous living, we need to recover the kind of community capable of supporting it."⁶⁷³ We may find "the trace of God" in each suffering other.⁶⁷⁴ The call, then, is for "each person acts[ing] as though [s]he were the messiah," bearing responsibility *to* the other to end the suffering *of* the other.⁶⁷⁵ In seeking to ease the suffering of the other, a community may truly become salvific.

Finally, we come to courage. Courage, when it came into the English language, meant to tell the story of who one was with one's whole heart. Trauma survivors cannot often do this in words, but their bodies speak the truth they have been living. One goal of trauma therapy is to restore language around the trauma event; another is to recognize the body's experience and unique "language." Tillich notes courage is "participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation," a place where our knowing meets God's

673. Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 54.

674. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 65.

675. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 90.

knowing.⁶⁷⁶ Often, however, God is unknown to us. The Ἄγνωστος Θεός, as described in Acts 17, depicts post-traumatic spirituality powerfully. The Unknown God, in whom we live and are moved and *are* is made known to us through the work of the Spirit. Healing begins to unfold in our lives as the Spirit reads and opens the “gaps and fissures”⁶⁷⁷ of our stories. In the presence of a trusted other, we gain courage to countenance our trauma and the lies it tells and begin to live more fully into the truth. In so doing, we begin becoming once more.

We return now to what I have called the participles of God, to the becoming so often lost in trauma’s wake. Participles function, in the English language, as a hybrid of verb and adjective. They are non-finite, modify that which follows, and may be active or passive. Post-traumatic spirituality may make use of these characteristics of participles to limn a way toward becoming once more. In our becoming-in-relationship, we change the world around us, the people around us, the God around us. We act, and are acted upon by the world, including by traumatic events. Yet trauma need not have the last word, for hope is not tied to a closed future. Rather, it is tied to the uncertainty of human life, the uncertainty of God, and choosing to hold open hope anyhow. In this place, we seek neither to elide nor center trauma. We recognize the very real impact of trauma and make a choice to live in the and/ands of aporia. When we recognize that we cannot—and should not—continue trying to outrun doubt, death, and fear, when we embrace them as parts of the human experience, we are able to open ourselves to the aporetic spaces of hope, life, and courage. It is in this place, wherein we recognize the presence of God and

676. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 22.

677. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 31.

the heart of the Other, that we may begin to understand ourselves and the world differently. This is an uncertain faith, a reasonable faith: that we may become, in relationship, fully alive.

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